Sulfur 13

THE COLLECTED POETRY OF CHARLES OLSON 1958–1964

JOHN YAU ON ROBERT MORRIS, SAM MESSER, AND HOWARD BUCHWALD

KAMPUCHEA BY ELIOT WEINBERGER

ESSAYS ON BAUDELAIRE, RILKE, AND SEIFERT

POETRY BY BERNSTEIN, CARRUTH, ESHLEMAN, GUNN, PADGETT, AND RAKOSI

NOW REPRESENTING

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from THE COLLECTED POEMS OF CHARLES OLSON:

1958–64

Edited by George F. Butterick

AS THOUGH THERE WERE NO FLOWING . . .

As though there were no flowing
of opposite to opposite except
in war of classes or of explan-
ation, when the conflict is

the kickoff of love, my son falls
from Tablet Rock, trips, from his usual
overdoing, lands on his head and, I wake
in terror, his neck is broken—was

to break his neck before love's kick-off,
and the man who said his wife was his mother
also dreamt his son was his father! These
pictures on the screen, he said, foretell!

The doom of all is in our dreams—and we
fantasy! Or this man stares, out of his
healthy face, back at his fat black terrier
wife, and says stubbornly I knew the girl

was not a virgin because a dream she had
told me she knew intercourse! Or he picks
bayberries with his pants down to get the
sun, and a woman comes down a hill calling

I see your behind. She does, and reaching
down he pulls up his pants, continuing
to clip bushes on the beach! Self-play is
fantasy or show while all the time the dark

flows and in the tug of its current going
from me to me I am, either I pour, because
I am a man, the nectar into my father's
bowl, or if I were a woman I'd be forced

into darkness by the regularity to be bride
of earth when I am out of the arms of the king
of hell. These are the genes of the soul, the stories
thrown on the shadow of the wall, but the sign,

the hand with the little fingers, which can be read,
bald and flat no more than a perspective of red paint,
stuck on the wall, is about what the paw means, when
one has writ it, here was I. In this forgiveness,

we have our chance

IN AN AUTOMOTIVE STORE

which is like a stock room anyway
a homely City girl and I

flirted, that is I skated
around in front of her as she stood smiling
too openly

on the other side of the counter
from me. A messenger

came in among the clerks

directly to me
with a piece of rubber
obviously from my car,

a small piece of metal
tying it together. The police
it seemed had come into possession

of it and wanted me,
the man said,
to come and identify

or take the car away. When suddenly
it struck me
the car was in Connecticut

and wasn't here in the City
at all. As I went out
a salesman,

in the hall which was the entrance
of the store and was like the hall
in a rotunda

was putting up a table
like at a Fair

of new automobile
electrical and battery
items

and my son
had grabbed hold
and wouldn't let go

of these connections
and I had to tear him
literally by ugly strength alone

away from them, ogling meanwhile
the salesman in apology
for this son of mine

who was such a willful
kid and I lifted him
like stiffly up and down

and bore him
out the door

I saw, from under Him, the beginning
of the web of God

Even to the exordial colors necessary
for a father to be a male

FERRINI—I

A STUDY IN IDEAL FORM

Into the pool at 5 AM to freshen
the new year Child (Dewsnap-Ferrini
was his name

Over the nearest hill
the day in rose arises
and, at night, Venus

in white, tell-tale
of evening the woman's song
accompanied by a bell

French woman's voice
as women on a hillside in Greece
rent Pentheus

and a bell counts two prime numbers
out of which arose the World—the World

is composed of two prime numbers, Alpha
and Epsilon

*

Formed into two
the organ
of the eye

scoptophilia
will make the new one
blush

while at the window
in the dawn a woman
in all the beauty
of her naked body
looks out and does not know
the man behind her in the bed

regards her in a burst of joy

Welcome,
the morning of the World

The unceasingly gentle One
has come to put his arms around you

Dawn fell
and in the next instant
already pregnant with the boy
espied another was to the liking of her eye
and took him down upon her as the crow
set to watch her in her loveliness
flew up helpless in the light
to warn his master who already knew
and said why did you not, white crow,
tear out the lover's eyes? and turned him black
and flew himself to kill
the mother of his child
and quite forgot
until she lay before him cold
that this was she whom he
had found so much
and in her grave cut out
his unborn son

The eye
shall hold us
to the course

the eye
which holds us in the mind

*

Apollo's son by Dawn
he who wouldn't marry many women
but got them all by child

a kiss beneath
an oak-tree
the cherry lips

rub her belly
she liked you to kiss
her rosy tits

then ground the body
in a selfish dance
in the middle of the room

in the night

Or his own Boeotian mares tear
Glaucus into pieces
and both men and women shriek aloud
hysterical or
he implored loudly
so that the house was full of his voice
as the air was with his hands
his hands were the healing plants
of his body
the actions
of his days
the preventative
of his troubles
the carvings
of his hours
and minutes
all which was not expelled
all which was formally kept
that which did count
as epsilon
in the creating
of the world
a epsilon

Purity
is an intensifier
not a state

The eye sees
instantly—not a delay

Alpha,
and Epsilon

the sound
is immediately
on the air

alpha
and *epsilon*

nothing need be spit out
as though it were a seed
passed in the urine

pursing the ass
or the mouth

the ideal
creates the fluent organ
or it is not worth the thought

and the child suffers
as a man he can say ai-ee

if in his time he chooses
or because he finds out

His friend said
that he saw him walking
on the opposite side of the street
but he didn't stop him
or ask him if he wanted a lift
because he noticed
that he was walking talking
to himself
with his hands

If he should find out
what his hands are

*

II

an organization turned toward two worlds at once
requires

a cognitive means which supplies both motive and
direction

originary and essence

wash yourself

in the pool to begin the morning

so that you may know what it is that you are doing

in the latter part

of the day

Dewsnap-Ferrini

was born of a pretty mother
at 5:30 of
a frosty morning

and he was lucky
for it was after the turn
of the dirty year
the dirty turn
of the year
when those who are born
when the sun has faltered
and not gone down and has not come back
who are held in the year like the crack of a vise
the crack of a vice
time is in
Saturnalia
all holly and anything
which protects throw in
for the birds who can't get food
against the unholy things which are abroad
in this desperate season

Dewsnap-Ferrini
was born in a pretty picture
on a hospital bed

danger, the snap-shot
danger the year

blue-gray the eyes

blue-gray the hair

The lover
who knew her best
remembered
50 years later
what it was like—something terrifying,
he said,
about her embrace

elemental, archaic.
She was completely amoral
and yet very pious, a vampire
and a child. And Nietzsche,
when he met her: I am greedy
for her kind of souls. In the near future
I am going to rape one.

"I shall never be faithful
to men." And her husband
who knew the only way to get her
stabbed himself, and for 43 years of marriage
never once knew her as his wife

Virgin of the

bad magazines

Sacher-Masoch

writes you up

Dewsnap-Ferrini,

in your care

III

Hines-Orpheus comes floating
down down the good path-way

wants Heaven without Hell
good Hines-Orpheus

plays on his flute
or does not believe

or makes music of the squeak
of her hair

oh where is the good mother
who will be the bosky girl?

*

he went into the sea
to get the grass
he swam down from the sun-drenched waters
at the beach-side,
Glaucus did
and the Bermuda fisherman
who speaks an excellent English
and as interesting in his pitch and tone
as a native of San Frediano,
has a good ear
fished up Glaucus,
found the grass-eater
in his net

Freud who did not know the Germans were
officialdom—and did not therefore properly
interpret dream. Co-kings, Hines-Orpheus and
Dewsnap-Ferrini: Dewsnap means impartial
beauty. We rule, beyond the mares' hooves.

IV

If I have used
the serpent's herb
I have done it
as Polyidos
to give life

And having done it
as Polyidos likewise,
because there is good reason
why we shouldn't know,
spit into my mouth

For the day,
which is that heifer-cow
that changes her color
three times,
from white to red,
and red to black

and whoever can say
as Polyidos did
what that heifer-cow
is like, can find Glaucus,
the Child-Raisers said,
and restore him even if dead

*

turn the eye
stem outside
don't look harmful
once more

make only one announcement:
I am half a dog-rose

I met my Angel last night or it was the corner
of Reservoir Road. He was me allright or it was I
went right ahead doing what I had intended, inviting
him to go with me on a train ride from that corner
to see a grand scenery I had been told or knew was
supposed to lie along the bank of a river which wld
be on the right as one rode the train down into the
City—was a fully developed subway or surface train
even Reservoir Road was a complex of the City, and had
never myself taken this trip, so off we went even though
I thought he was blind and henceforth the scene was his,
inside the train. He got a passenger sitting beside me,
on my left, to shoot craps with him—in the aisle, was
his point, and he made very evident he thought that was
what you did if you shot craps you played where you were
and looked over his shoulder at any conductor might be in
the car behind as though to point out to either the fellow
beside me or myself that one did this whether or not there
were any objection. I observed then, as he stood there, that
he was not a bum, as I had also thought, or that there was
anything shabby about him, if there were he was in control
and commanding as much of his being as one might, holding
himself in his shape and ability, and, on the point at hand
shooting craps, that he was able. It was this, his ability,
which showed itself when we were back again at the corner
the original corner where the restaurants were (we never
did get to the scenery). He was by this time some sort of
a counterman or short order cook himself, at least he was
standing behind a counter at which I and, on my left again,
two eaters, one of whom (the one nearest me) was an old
friend who has long been a loaded finger-pointing pal of
mine. The two of them were finishing up a cheesecake pie
while I and my shadow looked on, and the three of them
were on the side of how good the food was in a restaurant
at the same corner, to which I disagreed. The climactic
point came when my old friend clinched the argument by
claiming how good the cooking was there, even to the fried
partridge or pheasant day penises! At which point the Angel
turned to me and demanded I give back to him a fish I didn't
even know I was carrying. Which I passed over the counter to him,
and that was that.

The final scene took place shortly thereafter
when (still thinking he was blind) I tried to sneak, for my son,

a clipping or coupon off what later turned out possibly to be the same fish but at that moment was some generalized object of which this coupon was a part. Then it was my Angel clearly revealed he saw everything which was going on and with equal dignity demanded I put the coupon back, with severity
pointing out to me that
our name—his or mine or my son's or his mother's also—was written on the coupon and like a stock or bond piece was therefore only valuable in place. And so despite its perforated edges for removal, that "i" put it back where it belonged. Which I also sheepishly did.

THE DRUM WORLD

—God is a mushroom.

In particular one man
drummed in particular he sent waves
immediately
into the
air, he played directly
on to the table he was sitting by,
drumming he drummed
upon the Tree of Life he was drumming
on the wood
of the tree of life,
of Inanna's tree, the Djed
pillar

a time (count)
completely open, and his own
the world open, and counted (Clarke's
'clock'

1

Men rode
the plataforma
on the narrow-
gauge track

and acquired
the gold or betel or any other riches they wanted
to take or make out of
the earth

Out of the Earth or of woman, out of the genetic
out of that which comes into being, which forever
will come into being. Which is forever
only one step away from
the originary, only one step this side of
the originary, that near,
from the beginning to the end of time and count,
to the imagined. The World

is only one step this side of the motive
of Creation, these tracks
which run as though through Love, Tartaros, Earth, and Chaos,
each of these motives as flight, which
disappears behind itself in the air, consequence
runs through—makes a complete path for the plataforma

simplest hugging track and vehicle to go through
growth, or wet ground bog—land-rover—or all but lank lagoons petrified
air and sound, horror of still rottenness dankness laziness
permanent arrest successful
living deadness with birds muskrats suddenness clanks ripples suckenings
the uselessness of growth without man, woman without man. Man alone is
alone capable of being
alone

The World itself the firmness
of Earth, of woman, of love—of life,
is the evidence, is the first instance *after*
of the perfectness
of the imagined

2

not a sleigh, not a carved wagon
for forwarding: the fingers, heel of the hand both hands
all fingers
the blessed air disappears beyond the envelope
of the earth, it is black
above sound, the sun
above sound
is instant deadly rays, is only a red candy stuck

upon blackness which kills
instantly. Beyond the speed of life outside the air of earth
it is rank creation

men with tools or horses or
standing in the special day's
air accompanied her
as her cart was drawn
in demonstration through people
come to see the goddess

or the boat,
with what he had accumulated
because he was or had accomplished
rule or power or usefulness
for others, drew away
from the wharf or beach of his
kingdom, apparently
putting out
to sea, actually
being guided
(as her careful wagon
her maze
wrought
in the wood or bronze
welding of her
plataforma) his boat
when out of sight of the people mourning
was taken
up river
and not sent out upon the distance of the sea,
was,
by family or by priests—by those who love whom they love, taken
to earth, the boat,
80 foot long is carried one mile inland
to the cemetry where a hole
big enough toenclose it has been dug. And
with all his treasures, even possibly not his body
—or hers, who, Oseberg, is the queen lying
in the preserved boat—

hauled up hill,
taken from the sea,
fooled the people at the wharf

—the dream,
of eternity—steered
solemnly, by those in charge or
those closest, up the Deben estuary away from the sea
taken up hill like Djoser imagined his pyramid all his life and had it
built—
and set down inside the sand, which then
was turned in likewise over it
until he—or her—and his ship—or hers
were covered by a hill which stood out over
the ground inland
from the sea (or Djoser
from the Nile

THE DRUM II
(for John Clarke)

---

my apple branch dressed
in her green Isis night gown

standing on her tip-toes to see
how she looked in it in

the window mirror of my own
Seth Thomas wood run clock

---

as if Hallam Movius had placed a grid over it, and plumb-
lines were dropping from each of the fixed corners across
the grid

and I know a poet and story-teller who is himself already,
or his poetry is, a flavor rises off those poems and a surface
of something as encompassable

as the American Civil War: it isn't
50 miles wide in fact, centering on Centreville or Orange County
Courthouse (Culpeper—Warrenton) and, north and south, 150
miles will take you Etc Body of Event being
that Cental
Region and where
I can have
in this room
as I am writing,
November 12th,

1965, the sharpened
—whittled—
sticks a foot and a half
long. Mind you only little scratched sticks
like that boy in blue had used
to protect
himself or impale
any skulking Rebel creeping
up on his prone position *last*
night or day of *last*
battle of Chancellorsville C.H. or Wilderness
where I found it mounted as that soldier had
died & rotted in back of it or removed himself but
left these whittled sticks sticking
as his own little night's fort
in front of him: I *found* it, 90 years later, I mean whittled sticks
mind you just as he'd constructed it, one night,
two sticks
made into
a protection

And carried them off,
from that easy
underbrush, astonished
as I still am that
a man's act, of this
slight an evidence, shall
stay raised in the grass
and the change
of the growth of
seasons, just think even snow's weight, nothing
storm or trees crashing or a bird or an animal
using this
useful
thing
until I came along apparently the first person
99 years after that nearly last night of that
long war and saw
as though I had come on new birds' eggs in a new
nest, spotted blue, this
chevaux de frise
tells me
we are

Clayton Eshleman

TUXEDOED GROOM ON CANVAS BRIDE

[tuxedo. From the name of a country club at Tuxedo Park, near Tuxedo Lake, NY., fr. Lenape p'tuksit, *an esoteric term for wolf, lit., he has a round foot, the name of the Wolf subtribe of the Delawares.]*

The artist in tuxedo with cigarette instead of brush,
in undertaker clothing, with surgeon white beneath.
His body in the black sleeves of a repressed
belch, staring, at what is behind his eyes:
gas from the social wafer,
the one with manhole lids and cathedral flagstone.

Max Beckmann had round feet and was a wolfman as he tore
his tux into shred-like spars to keep afloat
through two World Wars—bandages to bind
the "infinite divinity" of God to "arrogance before
God, defiance of God, because
he has created us so we cannot love ourselves."

A black impasto to deaden the edges of human bodies,
to scab pores so that the bestial God would suffocate,
so that the congeries of selves we all enclose
(Fascisti that we are,
bundles of stick-like selves, stick
figures awaiting ignition,
that when not transformed become
an emperor's mace) were activated—
but not so activated that they expanded into liberation
or abstraction, or a new conservatism.
Beckmann saw the tux coming in:
an "aristocratic" academy was to be pitted against Fascism.

In our time, rhymed verse associated with Pro Life,
"free verse" associated with Fascism
by a middle class now filled with "artistic" hubris,
which does not understand that
the artist is neither revolutionary nor conservative,
but a worker of the between,
a messenger from the centerless flux,
caretaker of the rational and the irrational. The divine is
stigmata and we are to express it. Think of us as a force being
torn apart by both the left and the right,
the strength of Beckmann:
to record the multiple pulling for 40 years.

His mysteries bound in black leather radiate this inescapable paint.
Black becomes leading in the canvas-
cathedral shine of loosened invisibles.
He will not let go the desire to make burned
propellers gash through the auditorium of my morning.
"Everything is getting pretty funny and even more ghostly."
fun fuses furor
roars with horror

*

The hour has come for the still-life:
flattened by Beckmann,
the figure refuses depth (grandeur).
The saxophone lies coiled around a Mexican pot,
nearby a cactus is exuberating.
"Still-life" might include anything, for this room
in which "nature morte" is quietly panting
is a cage suspended in the abyss. About the scene,
"the great emptiness and uncertainty of space which I call God."
Inside the scene, the hunger of knowing no tasty
reward will be conveyed on the tray of a Hermic bellhop—
as a matter of fact, the bellhop hurries along past the cage.
A crown has been ordered by the executive in No. 408,
and because we are short on help these days
the messenger exercises a woman who pads along a cobalt sea.
"the sea, my old romance, it's been too long since I was with you.
You swirling eternity in your embroidered dress."

From the moment we first began to sense we ended,

from dawn at 14,000 BC when we found interiority at Niaux,
we have been dragging our shadows into
the functionless abattoir of the mind.
The mind contains a shadow-entrapment center,
yet the only results of the spiritual hunt are
the ghosts of animal hides over which
Beckmann's God's calcite is forming.

20th century shadows break out like pox,
striped measles,
welts sturdy as pieces of black fences he is hammering
against the God leaking dam, as if where he lives
is curse concrete to God's water.
"Iniquity lies in creation itself." "Unending divinity" indeed!

Creation. Catastrophe. The artist a demiurge turning
against the creator, a fish (or falling angel)
swerving against a bigger fish (or void)

The stumps, the bandages, the fetters

Blows against the body of God

*

The God splinters at log jam in his heart send out spikes of light, gold encrusted beams, swarming with harlequin ore.

He cauterizes ripeness with decay, individuals at intersection with themselves

Figures rush in, gods, non-gods, all screech to a halt, or screech to a paint, as if we were caught in our hallway at night, at 10 fathoms, out of sleep for a drink, in the drink we found we were still asleep, our entire body thirsty, the hallway bulging with all the creatures of our imagination,

yet not solipsismal black, because I know that in my own dream
I am king, and a king committing suicide,
and that as I drive the dirk into my breast
it is the back of his muscular Columbine, whose back
I've never met, and as he appoints that back, he is involved
with telescopes, he can only reach himself as a shadowed
profile in a mirror. He sweats there, statue,
his big dumb feet sticking out below the sculptor's cloth,
and when he elbows his way out of the strait-jacket of baptism,
or twisted sheets, or thought-before-sleep,

he is heiling, with lopped-off-wrist, an Olympia busy as a rice paddy in May,
His dream ends December 27, 1950, 10 AM, the corner of 61st Street and Central Park West.

Why has no Western painter painted subincision?
The archangels of the *lower* body?
A woman really giving birth?

*

And he will not offer you a real foot, but the way your foot looks to yourself,
which does not regard your foot in the same way as you do.
To you, foot is ideal foot, years ago heroic foot, now text book or media foot.
To your self, foot is the shape of your childhood foot,
something you grabbed for a thousand times in your crib, thus
your first sensation of pliable backbone,
the thing put in booties, a tennis shoe, Church shoe foot,
swimming pool fin foot, plaster casted,
invisible thus rotting, a foot with its own death, a chrysalis.
When you reveal your foot to your self, to the audience of your selves,
all the soul stances that have misidentified your foot,
what will your foot really look like?
At 50, it is approaching your father. It gets whiter as you age, more—and less—marble.
The bones inside, victorious caterpillars.
This stump onto which you've stamped the invisible letter of your self.
The feet in Beckmann—that woman's calf—you've seen it at a glance from your car right
before turning onto the freeway, was it the way you mentally photographed her?
No, it was the accurate instant in which you saw her leg—her foot (you missed that),
what kind of dress was she wearing?
Why did her leg look like a wedge of paint?

We see out of embedded perceptions that snarl our selves
with honored images at home and at school.
What we totally look like is a perspective that belongs to the gods.
We have real feet, self feet, god hoofs.
What is pushed into my socks is an ending

freckled with innocence and filled with the guilt of stepping on snails.

Paradise is boudin-like particle against particle

*

"Nothing is left to us but protest—boundless contempt for the lascivious bait with which we are repeatedly lured back to take life's bit in our mouths. When we are half-dead of thirst, and want to quench it, the mocking laughter of the gods appears."

His always-semi-nudes whose breasts like ice-cream-cone scoops keep popping out of their bras,
so that the woman giving birth is ready for the next comer (the newborn is already elderly).
One can follow breasts in Beckmann like the bits of white bread left as a trail in the forest of so many tales,
or one can follow crowns, or drums, one can watch a road of things take on curbs, a seascape withdraw via the room and window we are viewing it through.
His impasto schizo candle flames, wet lemon tar, and the candlesticks themselves, thugs, always asquirm with the otherwise questionable equilibrium, muffled waxen shouts that *more light* means *more dark*.
The soldier's dream is to be with his red-headed lass forever in a swimming pool, and he is, with a cage lowered over the pool, while the bugler who will wake both before they have embraced is already bugling, and the sleeping goddess he will never penetrate is holding up the clockface of departure—
Departure! The "unending divinity," the "great emptiness and uncertainty of space," is only center stage. At both sides, the obscenity off-stage is at full tilt. Ariadne and her two kings will never depart, for the heaven and hell wings of the triptych are inside us, bound to our pillars, bent over our crystal balls. The catch in the shallow hold of the archetypal skiff rots, but its putridness never turns to dust, for we all refurbish the loss with our own organs.

*

The manticores are singing with their triple bandsaw mouths.
They are singing the love song of Max Beckmann

"in that empty dining room . . . of the main train station in Frankfurt, beneath the pitiless white of the electric lighting, all alone with a bottle of champagne and a Brazilian cigar. There he sat, broad-shouldered, heavy, absent, thoughtful, observing the imaginary scene, no, the virtual reality, as keenly as if it had edges. There he leaned, pale, fixated in a cold fever, on his forehead beads of sweat like an exhausted porter who had thrown down his load . . . Never have I known such a lonely man. One could not seriously want to imitate him."

This corrosive song now blows through the LA County Museum,
through the heads of the cistern folk assembled to wonder why
art is so ugly. They had been wheeled in expecting
a golden drop to fall from the tip of an archangel sword into
their wishing-well faces, but Beckmann was buffing
his shoes in the corner, and when he looked up
there was a fraying net filled with green, decomposing fish.
There were eyes in the side of the fish,
portholes giving vista to the submarine picnic
where the 400 pound nude rolled over into your salad and mine.
That's life, she explained, with trident and leash,
right here: the motionless whirlpool of the sink
yesterday's pasta, Perseus, and a blind organ-grinder
revolve in. And life is short at the wick,
while the flame itself extends in silken bands,

black fractures,
frilled poles,
cored orchids,
moral holes.

The beef of the abyss
shaking its bars.

Pelican tattooers
summoning Mars.

Acrobats roboting acts
on crutch-thrones,

crones
in the arms of winged
drones,

God on the band of a bicep
moaning
its steel chanson.

The OM spurting pike and
its OM flirting sister.

Lashed spine to spine:
the masquerade,
the turning marmalade,
the torpedo and
the blister.

Bucklered, caulked:
the vault in which
tuxedoed groom on
canvas bride are

forever displayed
before the gawkers,
the guards,
the burglars,
and the butts in the tray.

1985

ROBERT MORRIS'S

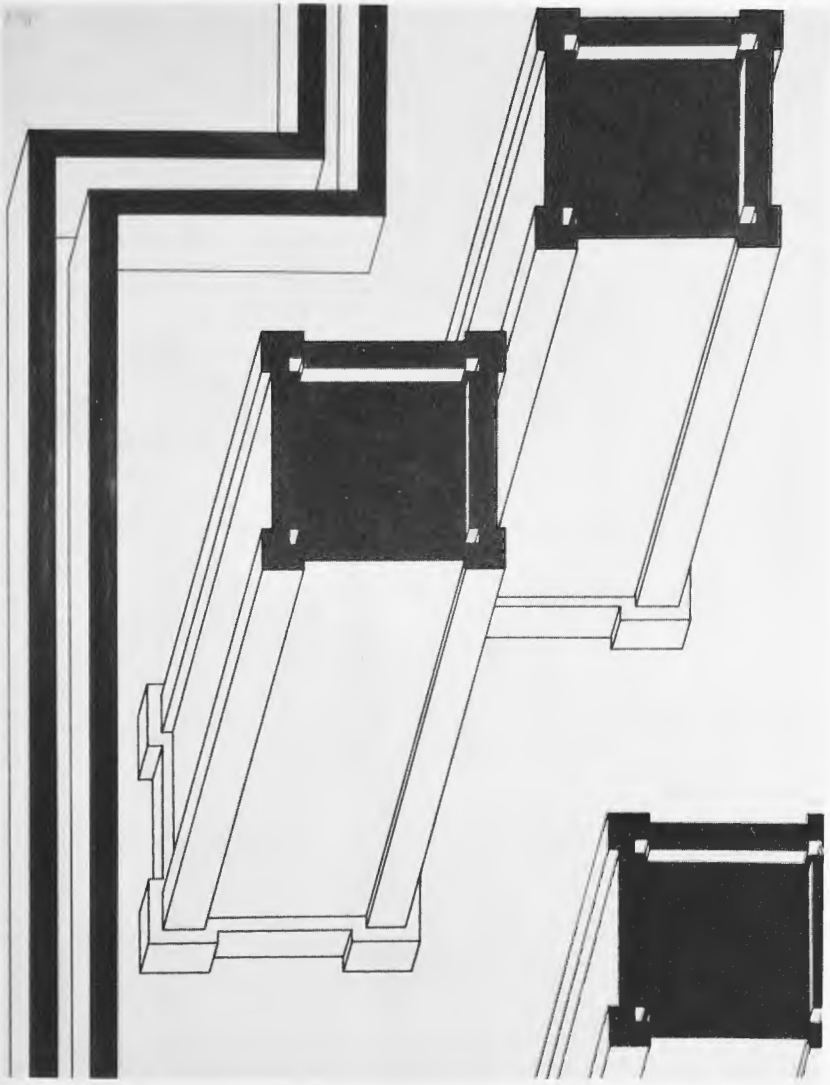
In the Realm of the Carceral

John Yau

Inspired by both his reading of Michel Foucault's history of prison, *Discipline and Punishment*, and an exhibition of Piranesi's *Carceri* drawings at the National Gallery in Washington in 1978, Robert Morris worked on a series of drawings titled *In the Realm of the Carceral.* Done in ink on large sheets of white paper, the twelve drawings extend the artist's interest in the use of repression and control in various architectural forms. The realm is a fictive one that exists in what Morris terms "The Present Tense of Space." (1)

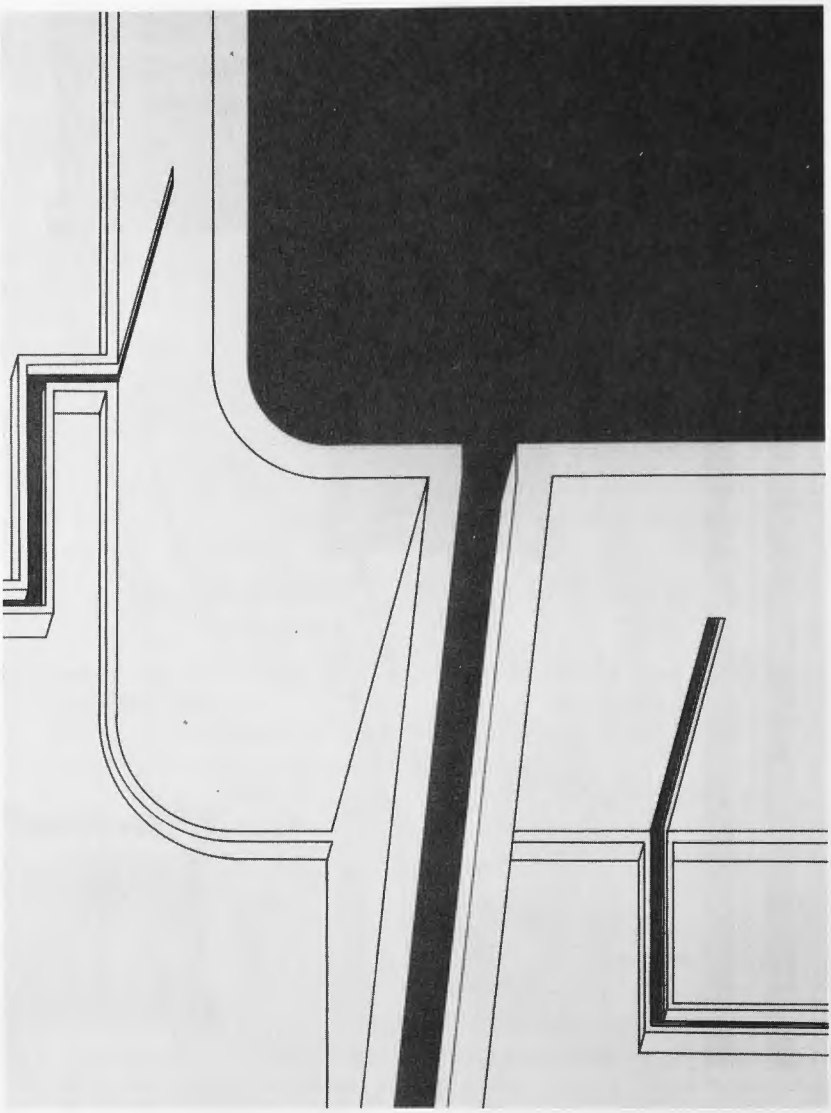
While the severity of the lines and shapes recall such earlier drawings as the ones in which the artist planned a series of sculptures done in two inch thick steel plates (1970), as well as his plans for labyrinths and mazes, *In the Realm of the Carceral* has no objective counterpart. At the same time, and in direct contrast to many of his steel sculptures of the 70's, the I beam-like shapes in *Towers of Silence*, for example, have been contextualized. Paralleling the image of a prison is the thoroughness of Morris's approach. Not only is the space between the lines sculptural, but it also must be speculated on by the viewer. The blank areas are to be filled in, like a questionnaire.

(1) The title of an article by Robert Morris which appeared in *Art in America* (January/February 1978) pp 70-80.

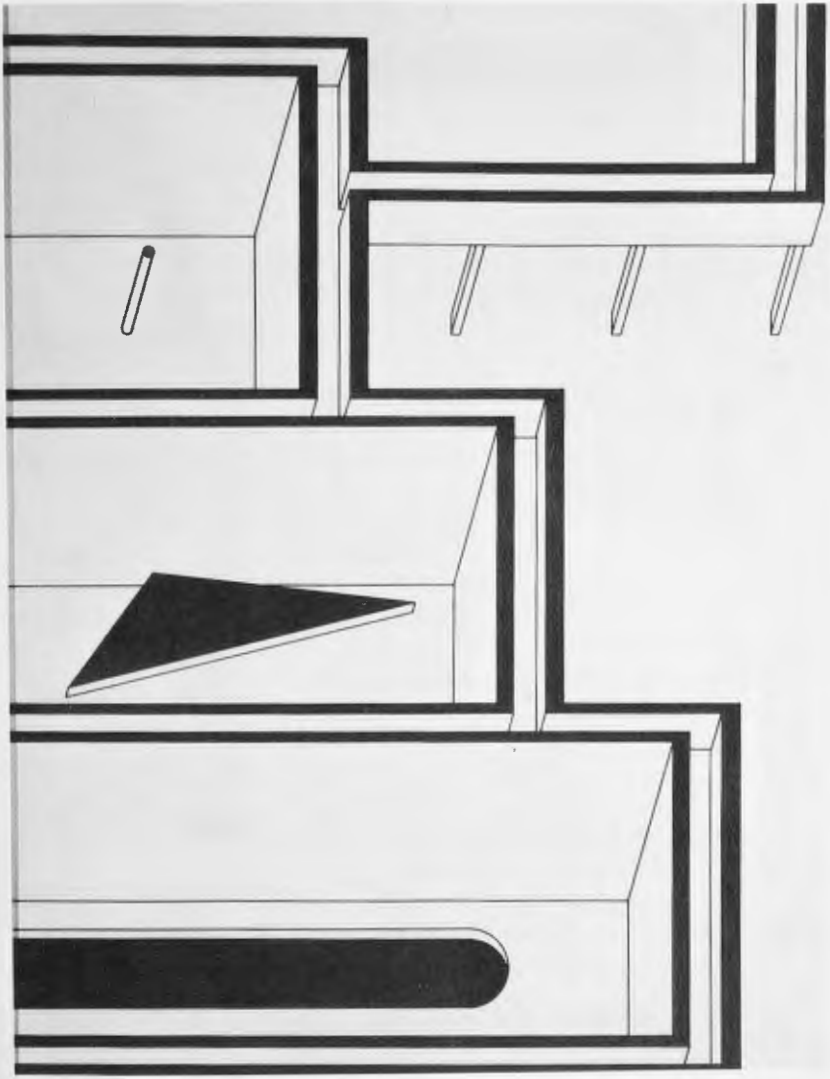


In the Realm of the Carceral—Towers of Silence
Ink on paper
45" x 33¾"
1978

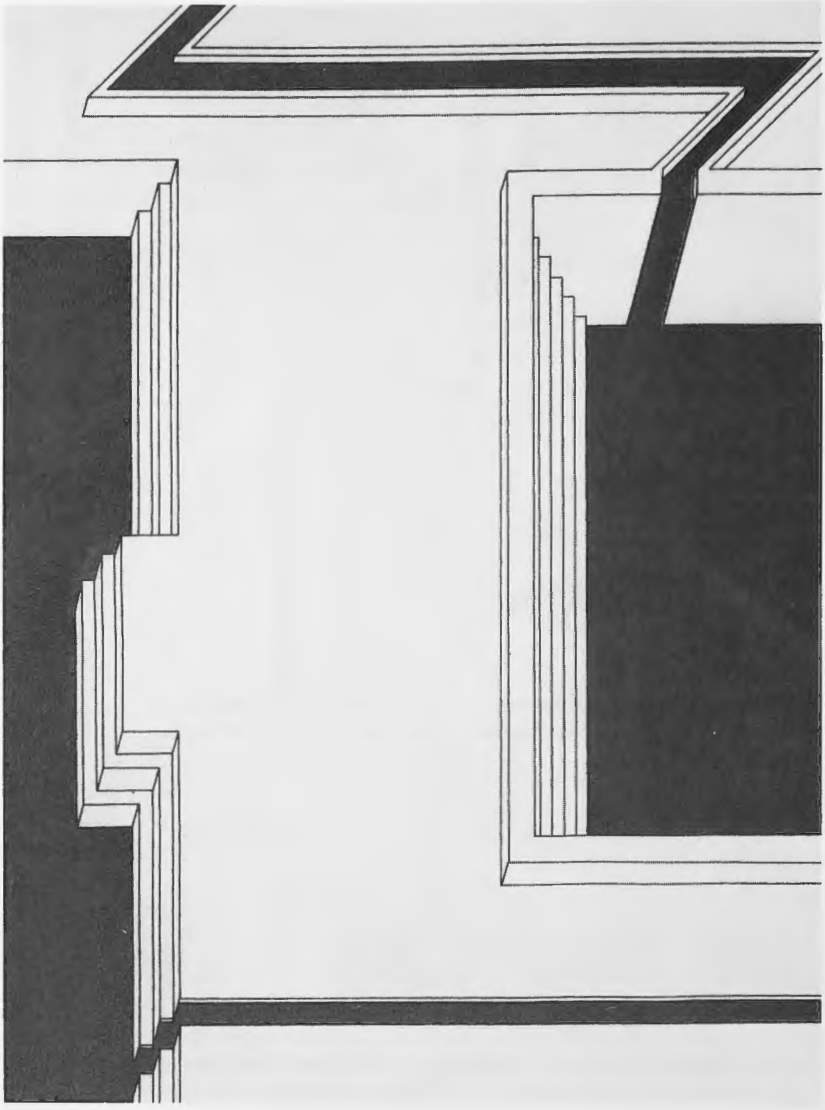
Photo credit: Bevan Davies
Courtesy of Leo Castelli, New York



In the Realm of the Carceral—Flume and Sluice Gates for the Pools of Persuasion
Ink on paper
45" x 33¾"
1978



In the Realm of the Carceral—Observation Yards
Ink on paper
45" x 33¼"
1978



In the Realm of the Carceral—the Hot and Cold Pools of Persuasion
Ink on paper
45" x 33¼"
1978

Jed Rasula

TOWARDS RILKE IN ENGLISH

As a boy he ran headlong into the legs of portly Johannes Brahms in a public park. As a young man he visited Tolstoy with the only woman Nietzsche ever proposed to: she later introduced him to Freud too. He sat in Rodin's studio as George Bernard Shaw posed for a sculpture. He made friends with Busoni through a lover who'd been the composer's student. Busoni introduced him to D'Annunzio (whose flame Eleanora Duse he also knew). For a time he lived in the same Paris hotel as Isadora Duncan, Jean Cocteau and Rodin. Later in Munich his next-door neighbor was Paul Klee. Kokoschka was an acquaintance, along with Thomas Mann, Stefan George, Franz Werfel and Stefan Zweig. His friends included Hofmannsthal, Paula Modersohn-Becker, André Gide (who translated his work) and Paul Valéry (whom he translated). He visited Maxim Gorky on Capri. Ludwig Wittgenstein bestowed on him a hefty cash gift. His poetry was of primary importance to a young protégé of Edmund Husserl's named Heidegger. The Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva wrote to him, "You are not the poet I love most. Most already implies comparison. You are poetry itself."

Seen in the light of these associations, the conventional image of Rilke foreshortens the perspective drastically, leaving nothing but a caricature. It is of a boy dressed in skirts, growing up to a pampered life as the ward of noble spinsters in their castles and chalets, writing dreamy poetry until in a single overpowering burst of inspiration the *Duino Elegies* and the *Sonnets to Orpheus* were wrenched out of him, after which he pricked his finger on a rose and died. Conveniently ignored are the long years in military academies, the considerable time spent alone and in near poverty in barren flats and hotels, the attentive craftsman persisting

in his writing regardless of "inspiration," and death by leukaemia (which is not under any circumstances transmitted by rose thorns).

The stereotype is notoriously persistent. I suspect that it is American in its orientation, if not its origin, because of the several occasions on which I've heard American men (who admire Rilke's poetry but know little of his life) speculate that Rilke had no sexual experience. This says more about American men than about the European poet who had a considerable number of lovers, a wife and daughter, and wrote some well-informed erotic poetry as well as the following indispensible observations on sexuality in his "Young Workman's Letter": "The terrible untruthfulness and uncertainty of our age has its roots in the refusal to acknowledge the happiness of sex, in this peculiarly mistaken guilt, which constantly increases, separating us from the rest of Nature, even from the child . . . In order to describe the peculiar situation of our sensual appetite we should have to say: once we were children in every part, now we are that in one part only." These observations were written down in the midst of the legendary whirlwind of February 1922, during which the *Duino Elegies* were finished and the entirety of the *Sonnets to Orpheus* so unexpectedly appeared. That Rilke found it in him to compose a major essay at that time is little known. But for Rilke, poetry itself arose like sexual ripening and fruition. Sexuality was, with poetry, the primary medium for creative transformation. As he observes in the essay, " . . . my sex is not directed only towards posterity, it is the secret of my own life . . . " It was an open secret (as he once observed of the ancient statues of pharoahs, that their smiles signified pollen) that constituted the intimate shareable space so many women responded to. The great danger for Rilke, in fact, was that he could easily expend all his creative energy in relationships—hence his unwillingness to sustain his affairs or commit himself fully to his marriage.

Rilke lived the pure life of poetry as much as he could. Not as idealized abstraction, not the symbolist quest (or at least not after his earliest years as a poet), but as an immense task and labor. His restlessness was a means not of distancing the world but of preserving his work-space. The time he spent as Rodin's secretary was Rilke's most absorbing lesson as a poet; it was there that he came to understand the importance of *work*, and how applied labor is itself inspiration enough. The intractable difficulty of being a poet, as he was aware, is that there is no studio containing all the proper materials of the craft: the only workspace is in the mind, and is available only in conjunction with a sense of appropriateness and ease in an actual environment. Rilke looked with envy on Rodin's cluttered rooms, with their fragments of sculptures, work-in-progress, juxtaposed with ancient statuary, paintings by friends, and the miscellany of stimulating objects: "One has almost the sensation of never having felt so strongly the undiminished individual effect of works of art of the most different kinds and periods as in this place, where they have no appearance of

striving to please as in a collection, and are not forced to contribute of their own store of beauty to a general sense of well-being which has no reference to them. Someone said once that they were kept like beautiful animals, and that really does describe Rodin's relationship to the things about him . . . " Rilke himself was extremely sensitive to animals, and on more than one occasion declined the offer of a pet because of his intuition that the presence of a living being would absorb too much of his creative potential.

Rilke possessed the keenest sense of his work and what deprivations were required of him in order to commit himself wholly to it. It's well known that Rilke didn't want to undertake psychoanalysis because of a hunch that his personal demons would be disposed of (and his workshop, as it were, demolished). What's less well known is the fact that it was in the very process of defining his position on this that he suddenly began writing the Elegies at Duino. The tension is there in the opening lines for all to hear—another 'open secret': "Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels' / hierarchies?" (Stephen Mitchell trans.), as if Rilke knew that on earth his cries would be heard by a psychiatrist. Several days after writing the first Elegy he could dismiss all possibility of analysis with the comment, "Something like a disinfected soul results from it . . . "

II

We need to reread Rilke's workshop—for that is what his writing constitutes. A self-perpetuating fixation that originated with Rilke himself is the stress on the *completed* book. The few volumes of poetry he chose to publish were project-oriented: *The Book of Hours, The Book of Images, New Poems, Requiem, Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus.* It's time to realize that these titles constitute Rilke's ongoing need for boundary-stones indicating the stations of personal necessity. With Rilke it makes more sense than with almost any other poet to see his published books as specific arrangements of a case history. There is an enormous body of poetry outside this self-propagating canon, though it's only recently become possible to recognize the value of what Michael Hamburger calls the "unofficial Rilke."

Because of his popularity, translators have always felt obliged to deliver up the credible, self-sanctioned Rilke. J. B. Leishman's numerous translations carefully follow the organization of the German editions. The two-volume *Selected Works* is simply a translation of the 1948 *Ausgewählte Werke* (the New Directions paperback edition of Rilke's prose, *Where Silence Reigns,* is a retitled reprint of the first volume of the *Selected*). Leishman's translations of *New Poems* and *Poems 1906–1926* also preserve German textual arrangements. Only in recent years has there been some indication that translators are willing to make their own presentations of Rilke. John Mood's *Rilke on Love and Other Difficulties*

(1975) was the first and still most alluring exposition of an alternative Rilke. Mood's mixture of commentary with thematic arrangements of translations is admirably done. The passages from letters are reprinted from previous translations, but the poems are in Mood's altogether deft versions, and his selection remains the primary source for reading Rilke fragments (from one liners up to page-long poems) in English. (Leishman's *Poems 1906–1926* is, like all of his translations, hampered by almost unreadable syntactic contortions in his attempts to preserve the rhymes as well as the peculiarities of Rilke's often un-German German.) Michael Hamburger's selection of *Poems 1912–1926* (1981) is well chosen and reads with considerable fluence by itself—though a poem by poem comparison with other translations makes Hamburger's versions seem somewhat stiff. Mood and Hamburger focus on material never collected by Rilke himself—superb though it may be—so their fine efforts will remain marginal to many. It wasn't until Stephen Mitchell's 1982 volume of *The Selected Poetry* (Random House) that a comprehensive, original edition of Rilke appeared in English which didn't either slavishly follow German precedent or distort the offering (previous so-called "selected" editions have confined themselves to the early lyrics). Mitchell's selection offers a major reorientation to Rilke. For one, he presents over two dozen remarkable uncollected poems in their proper chronological place. The earliest work is relegated to a minor role, with the *New Poems* adequately represented as Rilke's first indispensible effort, followed by a powerful translation of "Requiem for a Friend." Mitchell's inclusion of selections from *The Notebooks of Malta Laurids Brigge* and some of the rejected drafts for *Duino Elegies* (as well as all ten Elegies, with 15 of the *Sonnets*) compounds the value of this edition. Furthermore, Mitchell's selection from Rilke's letters and essays—unfortunately relegated to extremely fine print in a lengthy section of Notes at the end of the book—is commendable in its own right as a small anthology. Fine as Mitchell's editorial job is, his translations are a major accomplishment. He seems possessed of a most enviable ability to *evision* poems in English in place of Rilke's originals. While this does result in occasional augmentation of the text in order to make a genuine English language poem, I find Mitchell's tampering largely unobjectionable because it's so clearly in the service of the whole poem. Other translators add things to pad out a line or a phrase—local cosmetics for a shabby job, as often as not. With Mitchell, if you look at the German and don't find the equivalent, you can at least look at his English and feel the *need*, the poetic issue. Rather than attempting any duplication of Rilke's rhymes, Mitchell chooses to forward the momentum by subtly placed half-rhymes, resourceful and subliminal rather than overt and obtrusive the way full rhymes would be. He does this so consistently it's clearly a conscious decision, and I think the right one, given the disequilibrium which assiduous rhyming would introduce into the contemporary American idiom.

An indispensable complement to the Mitchell *Selected* is the book's 35 page introduction by Robert Hass. There is no other piece of writing in English that offers as sensitive an immersion in Rilke as this. In his laconic and distinctively American way, Hass manages to keep the overtly European side of Rilke at a distance without abusing him for it. Hass is able to go from the most striking assessments of Rilke's sombre side ("To learn not to be a stranger is the burden of the *Duino Elegies*") to such fascinating details as Rilke's enthusiasm for Quaker Oats, for instance, or his frank observation that the early poems "sometimes seem more interesting in English transation than they really are."

Hass' level-headed approach demystifies Rilke's angels quite usefully: "For Rilke . . . the angels were never hermetic knowledge. They were the ordinary ideas . . . whenever our souls make us strangers to the world." With Wallace Stevens on hand for so long, it's odd that such observations have been so hard to arrive at. There are points in Hass' approach one should be wary of, particularly his emphasis on Rilke's rootlessness. Hass suggests that his only real interest in *looking* at things was "in order to take them inside himself and transform them: to soak them in his homelessness and spiritual hunger so that when he returned them to the world, they were no more at home in it than he was, and gave off unearthly light." A cogent, attractive proposition, but it has an un-Rilkean air of melodrama about it. Still, Hass is often capable of the most piercing insights, as when he observes of the *Duino Elegies* that "they are the nearest thing in the writing of the twentieth century to the flight of birds" (i.e. the spirit soars, in them and in the presence of them, despite what one scholar has characterized as the lava-like flow of the language).

The most recent addition to Rilke in English is Edward Snow's rendering of the first volume of *New Poems [1907].* Before detailing some of the aggravations of this translation it would be best to indicate why the book was, for Rilke himself as well as for all subsequent readers, so important. Snow writes in his introduction that in *New Poems* the "consistently high level of accomplishment and intricate structure of motif make it for me Rilke's greatest single achievement as a poet, as well as the happiest moment in his oeuvre." Coming after a superabundance of translations of the elegies and Sonnets, Snow's point is worth making. There is much to be gained from a reappraisal of the *Neue Gedichte.*

Hass has written that "Rilke has clearly not abandoned the symbolist quest for the absolute in *New Poems,* he has dragged it, like a sick animal, into the twentieth century and brought it alive before us." This is debatable, I think, but the French background should be emphasized, and Symbolish as a mode of poetry is of course part of it. Baudelaire's poem "Carrion" was a favorite of Rilke's and provided much incentive for dispassionate, pure observation of very tangible physical realities. Rodin added a further provocation, insisting that the young poet immerse himself

in visual study as a preparation for writing, just as if it were a plastic art. If there is a Symbolist backdrop to the *New Poems,* their content is rinsed in actual observation. There is a fascinating undertow to the poems that is intrinsically nonvisual, however, and Hass makes a sharp observation about the first of them to be written, "The Panther" in 1903: "When Rilke began to look at things, the first thing he looked at was a caged animal . . . Rilke, deciding to write poems about really seeing, wrote immediately a poem about the exhaustion of seeing."

It was several years before "The Panther" was joined by comparable poems. The long blank-verse pieces that culminate the first volume of *New Poems* ("Tombs of the Heterae," "Orpheus Eurydice Hermes" and "Birth of Venus") followed in 1904, and in the winter of 1905–1906 there was a handful of short poems, but none of this seemed to be leading up to anything. Then, on May 11, 1906, Rodin abruptly dismissed the poet from his post as secretary. Rilke sensibly took it in the best light possible, as a gift of cleared space in which to turn fully to his own work. He promptly set about assembling an expanded edition of his *Book of Images,* and on June 14th wrote to his wife "Being occupied with the *B. of P.* (it was sent off today at last) has brought me back, if not literally into work, at least (after an incalculable interim) into warmth, into the body temperature of my soul . . . " The work was rapidly becoming literal. He drew up a list of a hundred potential topics or titles and crossed them off as he completed the poems. By the time he went on a trip to Belgium at the end of July he'd finished nearly fifty of them. A few more were written during the winter and spring on Capri (including two more longer ones, "Alcestis" and "The Bowl of Roses"), but it wasn't until the return to Paris in the summer of 1907 that he could find his workshop fully available again, so to speak. From July through early September he finished another 50 poems, completing volume one and having a substantial start toward the next. "More and more (and to my joy)" he wrote to a correspondent, "I am living the existence of the seed in the fruit which disposes everything it has round about it and outward from itself in the darkness of its working . . . In a word: I stand at my standing desk [Rilke wrote standing up] and nothing else . . . " In October his practice was confirmed for him by seeing a large exhibit of Cézanne's paintings. Cézanne, he comments in a letter, "knew how to repress his love for each single apple and to store it in a painted apple forever . . . In the poems [which he was proofreading for the printer] there are instinctive tendencies toward similar objectivity." With this, Rilke was clearly and affirmatively beyond anything Symbolism had to offer; his mood was to repress—or better yet *compress*—his feelings in order to concentrate on his chosen topics. He compared the work of earlier painters with Cézanne and said that for them, a painting said "I love this" instead of saying, as Cézanne, "here it is."

In November Rilke's close painter-friend Paula Modersohn-Becker

died. In December the first volume of *Neue Gedichte* was published. In 1908, for the third summer in a row, fifty poems were added to the others, and *Neue Gedichte anderer Teil* was finished. Just before its November publication, Rilke wrote hs stunning elegy for Paula, "Requiem for a Friend." Three years of intensive composition in a most deliberate poetic mode (mostly sonnets or close to sonnet length and rhyme schemes) helped Rilke attain the kind of concentration needed to bring the Malte Laurids Brigge project to a head, and the novel was largely written out during 1908–1909. After that, Rilke was so exhausted emotionally that he considered abandoning writing altogether. As famous as the watershed month of February 1922 is in the Rilke legend, we have to look with astonishment at the major act of sustained labor that went into the relatively brief period (1906–1909), resulting in both volumes of *New Poems*, the *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, *Requiem*, and the second half of his book *Rodin*. On December 28, 1911 Rilke wrote to Lou Andreas-Salome wistfully of "my best Paris time, that of the *New Poems*, when I expected nothing and no one and more and more the whole world streamed toward me merely as a task and I replied clearly and surely with pure work." Two weeks later the first *Duino Elegies* were at hand, and it's worth considering that Rilke's subsequent ten-year wait for their conclusion was anguishing to him precisely because the writing couldn't be undertaken as pure applied (almost manual) labor as in the earlier Paris years.

The Rilke myth has obscured the significance of the *New Poems* by focusing too much attention on the Elegies and Sonnets. But till the end of his life Rilke was reiterating the lessons learned during that time of intensive labor. Even the Elegies are not immune, as one of the ecstatic moments is in the 9th where the purpose of our being on earth, it is surmised, is simply to say the names of *things*. In 1923 he wrote of the primacy in the *New Poems* not of feelings, "but *things I had felt* . . . " In 1925: "The animated, experienced things that *share our lives* are running out and cannot be replaced. *We are perhaps the last to have still known such things.* On us rests the responsibility of preserving, not merely their memory . . . but their human and laral worth. ('Laral' in the sense of household-gods.)" That he was maintaining such a position long after the arrival of the Sonnets and Elegies is proof enough that the *New Poems* were a lifelong anchor for Rilke's bearings in the world and in all the rest of his work.

The goal of *New Poems* was to write poems that fit snugly into the world, kernels inside fruit. Rilke said of Rodin's statue of Balzac that it was "surrounded by the whole atmosphere," and that is very much the feeling of his "Ding-Gedicht" or thing-poem mode. These poems—though usually evocative of things, tactile and visually precise—are also thing-poems in that their palpability is manifest in the mouth. Apart from the impeccable rhymes, the sound values of the poems are furthered by cascades of vowel and consonant clusters and internal rhymes that only

Hopkins comes close to in English. Entire poems unfold as if on a dare to make a certain sonic complex cross a tightripe of narrow but substantial sense.

Reading Edgar Snow's new translations one would hardly imagine it. It is admittedly impossible to transpose actual sound patterns in translation (despite Zukofsky's example with Catullus), but the *New Poems*—of all Rilke's work—cries out for concrete-sounding renderings. Snow's versions are almost entirely lacking in any of the qualities that would make resonant poems in English. He wisely avoids rhyme (Leishman's translations are burdened by a quest for rhyme that often blurs the actual sense of the poems), but he makes little attempt at intermediate steps like the half-rhymes Mitchell is so good at. Snow's translations appear not to be informed by any sense of current poetic practice, unless it's that flacidity that makes so much American poetry (and Snow's Rilke) read like prose, broken into lines for the convenience of a half-literate audience that wouldn't otherwise recognize a poem. One can go for pages in Snow without encountering a decent *line* with its own balance or cadence. He manages to close "A Woman's Fate" with some poetic credence—"There she stood out of place like something / held in trust and grew blind and merely old / and wasn't precious and was never rare."—but it happens that in this instance Rilke made a point of breaking up the rhythm of that final line, as if to emphasize the woman's incongruousness. Snow's attractive final line gropes blindly for a rhythmic pulse that Rilke took pains to abort, "und war nicht kostbar und war niemals selten."

There is a further suspicion that Snow's German may be marginal at best. In "Orpheus Eurydice Hermes" it feels like he has looked at previous translations and tried to 'make it new' by avoiding any of the words or phrases which his predecessors hit on, rather than rereading the original by itself. Snow unaccountably adds words in various poems which contribute nothing to the sense: "allen diesen Dingen" becomes "all these waiting things" (no *waiting* in German); a simple direct address, "Mann," becomes "You abject man" (!); "In dir . . . "—simply *In you*, is rendered by Snow overzealously as "within yourself." To what end is all this? Without the restraint of a concern for preserving formal structure, what justification can there be? Incompetence is no excuse, and to encounter errors in a listless, plain, dull translation os sadder yet. Appropriate to such a botched job, perhaps, is the paucity of presentation in this North Point edition of *New Poems*. The texts are undated, there are no notes or apparatus of any kind, and the small introduction introduces nothing at all. In all fairness, I should add that Snow's version of the culminating poem, "A Bowl of Roses," is actually well done and succeeds in ways throughout its three pages that the shorter poems don't. Though even here I'm made uneasy by the final line: "It now lies carefree in these counter errors in a listless, plain, dull translation is sadder yet. Appropriate to such a botched job, perhaps, is the paucity of presentation in this

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III

Rilke's style has always held pitfalls for translators. The first generation back in the Forties (McIntyre and Leishman) were mesmerized by the rhymes, always so unforced and done with perfect ease in Rilke, generally intrusive and belabored in English. Leishman and so many other translators of the *Duino Elegies* are led astray by Rilke's unnerving syntax (extensive use of subordinate clauses, inversions of phrase, participles appearing as nouns, etc.). Rilke was, it is best to remember, a master of the subtleties of syntactic elongation, like Henry James in English. Rilke and James both spent their adult lives engaged in the fine tuning of social relations, and it's ironic that his translators haven't looked to James' nimbleness as a model for Rilke's most characteristic aspect, and learned what they could.

Hopefully the Stephen Mitchell translation is indicative of an exciting potential for Rilke in English, for his full range may only be available now in an American atmosphere enlivened and ripened by Olson's *Maximus*, Duncan's very open yet formal sequences, Ronald Johnson's resonant wordplay in *Ark*, Irby's syntactic ranginess, Eshleman's tactile interiority, and much else. Rilke's true variety can best be imagined by comparing it with our current range of poetries. The *Duino Elegies* have Olson's length and endurance with a hint of Ashbery's rhetorical ease. For the *Sonnets to Orpheus* we need to imagine something at once formal and relaxed, abstract and personal—a mixture of Zukofsky and Snyder, maybe, with Duncan's sense of flow. It happens that there is a booklength sequence in English inspired by and modelled on *New Poems*—Lowell's *History*, to the compactness of which we might further imagine Bunting's *sound* to envision a true complement. If we're ever to have a fully satisfying Rilke in English, the native terrain is going to have to be taken into account more adequately than the translators have thus far. Why demand less for a poet who was "poetry itself"?

Carl Rakosi

MODULES

Watching
old frog.
Plophh!
There goes
old Bashō
himself,
jumping
balls
and all,
into
the pond
again.

How dee.
Must be
Spring.

And great
to be
in a small
mode!

Stradivari
mixing
varnish
with the
beetle's
chitin.

To con-
solidate
and keep
the wood-
sound
natural?

And Sugano,
first
in audio,
carving
solid
briar root,
from where
the physical
properties
enter
the superlative
cartridge
soundlessly
as a mystique
in Orfeo's
perfect system.
After which
a great
trembling
of air
into music
for a techno-
logical
passage
on a stylus

from the earth
to black art.

Thom Gunn

Three Poems

TENDERLOIN

This poverty recognizes
a street only as link
between corners greasy
with expedient, corners
turned or waited on
slippery as they may be
for transactions, or news of them.

Not poverty beaten
down, poverty rather
on the make, without being
clever enough to make it.
Smallish sums pass hands.
This poverty seeks out
stereotype: gentle
black whore, foul-mouthed
old cripple, snarling skinhead,
tottering transvestite, etc.
City romantics.
Come on, you,
obey your impulse,
costs only a little more
than in the country.

It's all so
slippery, but
you might say one lubricant
is as good as another.
And there's no such thing
as an insincere
erection is there?

Think of Spanish
fly, it irritates
the urethra which
has been capable, however
of responding
to more delicate stimuli.

And of the loins too,
firm open slopes that lead
to the padded valley
Tender loin
protecting the serviceable
channel and glands
delicate almost as
eyeballs — Tender-
ness anaesthetized and irritated

Strip it bare

Grease it well
with its own foul
lubricant

Against the grit
of its own sharp corners
scrape it to orgasm

THE HONESTY

Every death he said
strengthens my life, he
was referring to the deaths
of friends. Little ogre,
vampire brat, his address
Ego Castle, where he has
thrived sixty years
on the vegetable
rinds of the strong, the
gifted, the fortunate,
or the simply kind. He
hates such fare. Sometimes
he gets a bit of their
blood too, as from
a scratched finger, tastier
than the carrot peel
of their detached reviews.
The dribble of blood
(Please let me lick
it Sir he says)
is a symbol. Remember
he was taught a lot about
symbols when he belonged
to a student body, wretchedly
undistinguished from a mass
of other limbs and faces.
He's just a would-be
vampire, but he does have
his fantasies! Every
death, he is correct,
darkens the red outline of
the now ambulatory castle,
sinewed, and thickly
veined, against the withering
landscape. Does he know
that the depopulation in progress
makes for fewer
bleeding fingers? Well he
can lick his own, by
the time he is ninety he will
be piercingly evident,
Crusoe against the sands.

IN TIME OF PLAGUE

My thoughts are crowded with death
and it draws so oddly on the sexual
that I am confused
confused to be attracted
by, in effect, my own annihilation.
Who are these two, these fiercely attractive men
who want me to stick their needle in my arm?
They tell me they are called Brad and John,
one from here, one from Denver, sitting the same
on the bench as they talk to me,
their legs spread apart, their eyes attentive.
I love their daring, their looks, their jargon,
and what they have in mind.

Their mind is the mind of death.
They know it, and do not know it,
and they are like me in that
(I know it, and do not know it)
and like the flow of people through this bar.
Brad and John thirst heroically together
for euphoria — for a state of ardent life
in which we could all stretch ourselves
and lose our differences. I seek
to enter their minds: am I a fool,
and they direct and right, properly
testing themselves against risk,
as a human must, and does,
or are they the fools, their alert faces
mere deaths heads lighted glamorously?
I weigh possibilities
till I am afraid of the strength
of my own health
and of their evident health.

They get restless at last with my indecisiveness
and so, first one, and then the other,
move off into the moving concourse of people
who are boisterous and bright
carrying in their faces and throughout their bodies
the news of life and death.

Hayden Carruth

Four Poems

MEDITATION IN THE PRESENCE OF "OSTRICH WALK"

Of the two cardinals the female is both bolder and more "beautiful."
She comes
To the railing, crest raised high, snapping her eyes this way and that,
Uttering the little nasal ech-ech of fear and belligerence,
Then down to the lower travis, then finally to the flagstones, where
she feeds.
Now comes the male, seeing the way is safe, and begins to hull seeds
and feed them
To her. The mind performs its wearisome gyrationing. The female
accepts
These token mouthfuls, but eats on her own between them. She is very
obviously
Able to take care of herself. Although most people say otherwise, and
say so vehemently,
The difference between Floyd Bean and Joe Sullivan is distinct, crucial,
And unique. I move my hand to rewind the tape and the cardinals
Are gone forever. Ora pro nobis, my good St. Chance, my darling.

THE AVENUE LINED WITH AMERICAN CHESTNUT TREES IS MORE THAN A TEXTBOOK

And the Chinese garden near Mobile, Alabama, is a perfect postcard.
Oh, yes, whatever imperfections exist there. The paths on the
sloping knolls
Make linear curvations, as on a shimmering silk panel, and a stream,
connecting the two ponds,
Twinkles beneath the arched bridge with bentwood railings.
Arranged just so are five ducks. Mandarins? The mind jactitates,
But that is another science. (How delicious, murmurs the contralto
of Mr. Stevens.)
The pagoda broods exiguously and exactly, a *trompe* off center.
On the facing hill is the false gateway, inversely arched and with
colored ideographs
Painted in slight exaggeration on the hatches, the whole gate itself
an ideograph,
But lo! it opens, swings wide at a touch, and there
Is a deciduous utility pole surrounded by a blanket of colorful
broken glass.
Bless me, Monsieur Villiers, for a moment I thought you were attempting
To convince me. *Félicitations!* You have avoided the teleological
brilliantly.

PROLEGOMENON TO A FANTASIZED PROPAEDEUTICS FOR KATHLEEN ROBERTS

O my dear, my little and young and bewildered and overburdened, my
parageniture,
I would, Kate, if I could get out of this old and ossified vocabulary,
If I could sing in the spring descants of your new song,
If I could seek far back in my childhood or far forward in yours
the images of your speeding apprehensions,
Or if, better, I could commune with you in our essential but impeded
sameness wordlessly,
I would ask you in utmost urgency to teach me sanity and wholeness,
To teach me everything you feel in your awareness of change and
divorcement, the world and time already your afflictions,

To teach me how to *understand,* how to fear and feel,
To bring forth from the soul your eager and still intrepid impulses
of love,
And I would offer you in return I do not know what, for all I have
in myself
Seems finished to me,
And I am to myself as bones to the Sonoran winds.
Yet dear Kate, my love still engenders this dream of an ancient book
Found in a house of stone, in darkness,
Its binding broken, its pages dry and crumbling,
In which like sapient tears the charactery still flows, a moist
animation of words from the source
Of primal pathos and intelligence, from beside the little fire in
the great woods,
A book I dream for you.
Kate, the book does not exist, it cannot, it is unwritten forever.
But will you share my dream?

NOT BY ANY MEANS HAVE I NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME

observed the green wave breaking and cresting. But this
is a new year, a new place, and the tall lilacs
at the back of the garage are leaping
up and over the wall and toward my window,
almost full. And all
the yard
is a crashing and falling of green with new menace.

Eliot Weinberger

A portrait of Pol Pot

KAMPUCHEA

I.

In 1969, there were 7,000,000 people in Cambodia. 90% of the peasants owned their own land, and the country, producing more food than it needed, shipped rice abroad. The government, such as it was, was ruled by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, who was popular among the peasantry and despised by the middle class. Despite personal excesses, he had successfully maintained Cambodia's neutrality through the Southeast Asian wars. Leftist guerillas, whom Sihanouk called "Khmer Rouge," had a few hundred troops in the mountains.

On March 18, 1969, the aerial bombardment of Cambodia by the United States began. These were the secret "Menu" operations—Breakfast, Lunch, Supper, Dinner, Dessert, Snack—and their purpose was the destruction of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese supply lines and "sanctuaries." They were a military failure, and an unknown number of Cambodian civilians were killed.

On March 18, 1970, the government of Sihanouk was overthrown by Lon Nol, the Prime Minister whose personality, mirrored back on

itself, was said to be as palindromic as his name. His press conferences alternated between long silences and lectures on ancient Khmer history. Within a year he was a stroke victim. Yet he remained in power, his presence giving U.S. and Cambodian officers and bureaucrats free rein.

Six weeks after the March coup, American and the particularly cruel South Vietnamese troops entered Cambodia. The bombardment became public and regular. From 1969 to 1973, the United States dropped 1,078,258,000 pounds of bombs on the country. The larger bombs created craters 18 feet deep and 60 feet in diameter.

By 1974, 80% of the rice paddies were abandoned, 75% of the draft animals destroyed. Millions were refugees, fleeing the American planes, the South Vietnamese troops, and the Khmer Rouge who, as the only opposition to Lon Nol, had grown numerous and strong. The economy shifted from agriculture to one based on arms and the jetsam of troops. Fortunes were made by officials and merchants. For the rest, starvation was prevalent. A bowl of soup which had cost 4 riels in 1970, now cost 300. In the capital Phnom Penh, now five times its prewar population, most of the trees had died, their bark stripped and eaten. Animals in the zoo were eaten.

By 1975, 500,000 Cambodians were dead.

On April 17, 1975 the Khmer Rouge entered Phnom Penh. Cambodia was renamed Democratic Kampuchea, and the 2,000,000 inhabitants of the city, as well as those in the other cities and large towns were immediately forced to evacuate, regardless of age or health.

The people were divided into three categories. The first group, known as the "old people," were Khmer Rouge supporters and those who lived in previously liberated areas of the country. The second group, the "new people," were those from the unliberated pockets, mainly the cities. The third group included those who had worked in the Lon Nol regime as civil servants, police, soldiers. Beyond this taxonomy were the larger minorities: Chinese, Vietnamese, and the Cham, and Islamic people.

The third group and their families were quickly executed. The minorities wer exiled or killed. The "New People" were marched into the countryside where, under the direction of "Old People," everyone over the age of six worked in the paddies or on huge irrigation projects in brigades as large as 20,000. They worked 18 hours a day for no wages. The pieces of canals they built did not link; their dams could not hold water. While many of the workers died of starvation, what rice they harvested was packed and shipped to an unknown destination.

Each "new" person was required to prepare an autobiography. On the basis of these texts, enemies of the state were discovered and eliminated: doctors, technicians, Buddhist monks, teachers, intellectuals, students. Anyone who had studied abroad was killed, anyone who spoke

French, anyone with fair skin, anyone who wore glasses. Survival was possible only for those who successfully obscured their pasts.

Overseas Cambodians were urged to return to their country to build Kampuchea. About a thousand did so, and eighty-five survived. It is also said that:

—Of 50,000 monks, 900 survived;
—Of 300 journalists, 5 survived;
—Of 416 art students, 14 survived;
—Of 41 librarians, 6 survived;
—Of 24,336 teachers and professors, 3050 survived.

The slogan for the "new people" was:

PRESERVE THEM—NO PROFIT!
EXTERMINATE THEM—NO LOSS!
WE WILL BURN THE OLD GRASS AND THE NEW WILL GROW.

To save ammunition, victims were clubbed to death, or had their throats slit with a notched sliver of bamboo. Babies were tossed into the air to be caught on the point of a bayonet. The craters left by the American bombs were used for mass graves.

All books, wristwatches, radios, cameras, television sets, individual cooking utsensils, musical instruments, religious objects, family photographs and works of art were destroyed. All Buddhist shrines and pagodas, all schools, universities, libraries and theaters were razed or turned into storehouses, pigsties, prisons. In Phnom Penh the Catholic Church was dismantled stone by stone. Street signs in the deserted city were painted over, white.

Kampuchean women and girls were required to wear their hair short. All citizens dressed in black; one suit of clothes per year was issued. Existing families were broken up; marriages required state approval and were held once a year in mass ceremony. Living quarters—large dormitories with long sleeping platforms—were segregated by sex and age. Non-conjugal sex was prohibited, as were all holidays, festivals, public and private pleasure activities.

There was no currency, no Western medicine, no postal service, no telegraph, no telephones. No conversation was allowed after dark, and no foreign words could be spoken. A four-page newspaper was published rarely, and was not available to the public. Radio Phnom Penh was played over loudspeakers in the fields. This was the national anthem, in the official translation:

> Bright red Blood which covers towns and plains
> Of Kampuchea, our motherland,
> Sublime Blood of workers and peasants,
> Sublime Blood of revolutionary men and women fighters!

The Blood changing into unrelenting hatred
And resolute struggle,
On April 17th, under the flag of Revolution,
Free from slavery!

There were no schools for children over ten. (Kheu Samphan, a founder of the Khmer Rouge, had said, "The more man is educated, the more deceitful he becomes.") Those younger attended one hour or less a day, memorizing songs and slogans. Reading and writing were prohibited throughout the country. Children who misbehaved in class were killed in front of their classmates. Sometimes the children were required to kill their classmates. Young soldiers received daily training in the "cruelty game": clubbing dogs and cats, setting cages of mice on fire, chopping off the tails of monkeys, feeding the monkeys—or occasionally children—alive to the crocodiles.

Kampucheans were instructed to emulate, not the ant or bee, but the ox: it works when it is told to work, eats where it is told to eat, lives always under yoke or tether. They were to live in the spirit of three renunciations: renunciation of personal attitudes, renunciation of material goods, renunciation of personal behavior. (Kheu Samphan had said: "We will be the first nation to create a completely Communist society without wasting time on intermediate steps.")

No leaders were mentioned by name. Kampucheans were told only to obey *Angka*, the Organization, and its local representatives, the peasant district leaders and the young boys with submachine guns. The country was completely sealed from the outside world; in the West Khieu Samphan was believed to be the head of *Angka*.

On September 29, 1977, more than two years after the Khmer Rouge victory, Pol Pot appeared in Peking to announce that *Angka* was in fact the Communist Party, and that he was both head of the Party and Prime Minister of Kampuchea. Following purges and shifts of power still unknown, a ruling quaternity had emerged: Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, and their wives, Khieu Ponnary and Khieu Thirith, who were sisters. Khieu Samphan was revealed to be merely a figurehead.

Litttle is known of Pol Pot. He has rarely spoken in public, been interviewed or photographed. His few public statements sound like this: "More and more friends do come to visit Kampuchea, but we have to make our country neater and more beautiful before we can receive guests." Or: "In terms of material achievement, such as factories, grain output, cultural activities and so on, performances have been modest, but we are very pleased with the development of the revolutionary movement of the masses."

He was born in 1928, and spent six years, like many Cambodian men, as a Buddhist monk. He went to Paris in 1949 to study radio electronics; returned to Phnom Penh in the early 1950's to teach at a

private school; became a well-known journalist; and was Deputy Secretary General of the underground Communist Party in 1962. In 1963 he disappeared for a dozen years. His name is a pseudonym.

Pol Pot's vision of Kampuchea was modeled on the reign of Suryavaram II, the 12th century ruler whose slaves built Angkor Wat and an elaborate hydraulic system. In Khmer, the word for "revolution" is *bâmbah-bàmbor* ("uprising" plus "reconstruction"). Under Pol Pot, the word used for "revolution" was *pativattana* ("return to the past").

On January 7, 1979, the Vietnamese army captured Phnom Penh, ending the Pol Pot regime. In the three years and nine months of Democratic Kampuchea, some 2,000,000 had died of execution, starvation, exhaustion.

The retreating Khmer Rouge troops burned fields and granaries. In the chaos of displaced millions attempting to return to their villages or find surviving family members, there was little production of food. It is said that 700,000 died in the resulting famine.

II.

The "slaughter" by the Khmer Rouge, said Noam Chomsky in 1977, *is a New York Times invention.*

As an ideologue, he was wrong. But as a linguist? What is *slaughter*? An accident of speech, easily mistyped into *laughter.* A word without reference for most of us, a word to be placed in quotation marks, taken on hearsay—an invention. And what is Kampuchea for us, the outsiders, but the inventions of the New York Times, and the stacks of United Nations reports, the microfilmed documents that whirred past my eyes in a library basement, the tales of ideologically selected survivors, the autopsies and revisions executed by journalists, "experts," and the politically convinced.

Kampuchea is nothing for us but a heap of words, and a few photographs: the piles of skulls; the map of the country, now on exhibit, made of human bones and hair; the sign of the security regulations in Tuol Seng prison, now translated for visitors, which ends (more words) "IF YOU DON'T FOLLOW ALL THE ABOVE RULES, YOU WILL GET MANY MANY LASHES OF ELECTRIC WIRE"; and the rare portrait of Pol Pot, transmitted by satellite from Peking in 1977: a middle-aged man with a pear-shaped head, a crewcut, eyes that stare into the camera, mouth a printed smudge—a face one wouldn't recognize on the street, the face of a police composite.

It is a heap of words: facts and specimens of local speech to be arranged on the page as I have done. Trying to think about Kampuchea, I begin in the only way I know how, by laying out the details: a little anthology, a still life (or more exactly, grim joke, a *nature morte*). I add

it up, and try to find the word that equals the sum, hoping that a word is the beginning of understanding. Not *genocide,* a legal term for a specific kind of mass murder, and not applicable here where killer and killed are indistinguishable. Not *holocaust,* that certain fire in history, a word that belongs to its moment. Not *atrocity, horror, disaster,* for they are now the stuff of everyday speech, their referents ranging from Hiroshima to Hollywood. There is, I think, only one word for what occurred in Cambodia during those three years and nine months: *Kampuchea.* A word with no other meaning, a word that doubles back on itself.

Kampuchea is a word with no synonym for Kampuchea was, above all, a totality, an entity complete unto itself. And more—it was a work of art, a fully realized act of the imagination, a vision fulfilled, Utopia. It was all of these things—if we take the words *art, imagination, vision, Utopia* to mean their opposite, to stand for words we do not possess: an art, an imagination, a vision, a Utopia in the service of destruction, in the service of death.

Kampuchea was, according to Ieng Sary, "something that never was before in history." Other bloodthirsty nations have had their barbaric logic. In ideological societies, a certain kind of human, or human behavior, is perceived as the *enemy,* the obstacle that must be eliminated (through war, genocide, purge) if that society is to be perfected. In some religious societies, an artificial cycle of life and death (sacrifice and rebirth) must be maintained to ensure the continuance of the cosmic cycle. In the recent cults of mass suicide, there is the belief that we are only here on earth as a way-station to the paradise beyond death. But in Kampuchea, man himself was the enemy—the works of man, human acts, human nature.

Like all Utopias, it was dedicated to the creation of a New Man—but a New Man so unrecognizable that to think about Kampuchea, to try to think about Kampuchea, is to find oneself in an imagination tht cannot be imagined; a world where, as in the streets of Phnom Penh, the signs are painted over, white. There everything is the same, but different. A sign is a sign, but it is illegible, even to the inhabitants. And yet it is still a sign . . .

Each image of Kampuchea begins in familiarity and ends in another world. I think of misbehaving as a boy in school, and then I imagine being killed, there on the spot, for it. I think of that universal gesture of throwing a small child in the air: the screams of the child, half-fear, half-delight; the hands of the adult or elder child reaching up. It is at the edge of the social contract: power used for the production of pleasure, the domestic benevolent dictatorship. Every mind has this memory—as child, as adult, as observer. But to imagine Kampuchea is to see (or to be) that child falling through the air, falling not toward the familiar outstretched hands, but to the point of a bayonet.

The perversion of the routine gesture is a commonplace of political

history: the prince is handed the goblet of wine, and the wine is poisoned. (Today one starts one's car and the car blows up, one opens a letter and the letter blows up. A microcosm of the nuclear disaster: when the Bomb goes off, we will all be incinerated in the middle of the most ordinary tasks.) But what is particularly Kampuchean was the elaborate variety, the multiplications of this perversion of the everyday. In Kampuchea, almost any gesture led to death.

It is easy to imagine oneself as a victim. (I wear glasses; I know foreign languages; I write . . .) But such thinking becomes a literal dead-end: to imagine oneself as dead is not to think about Kampuchea at all. Nor is it difficult, raised on images of murder, to imagine oneself, at least once, as a murderer. But Kampuchea was something more. It requires that one imagine oneself as a murderer in a society where all the living are murderers or accomplices, where there are no demarcated groups of murderers and murdered, where murder is the ordinary, and eating, sleeping, making love, making conversation, making art, the extraordinary. To think about Kampuchea one must imagine, not acts of murder, nor death itself, but a life of death. And it is here where my mind blanks out. Absolute horror, like bliss, is a world from which human speech cannot return.

I find myself circling back around the figure of Pol Pot, trying to read that almost blank page. He has at least one historical predecessor, the Chinese general Zhang Xian-zhong, who slaughtered the 100,000 inhabitants of a Szechuan city in the 17th century, and then erected a stone to commemorate the event, with this inscription:

> HEAVEN BESTOWS A HUNDRED GRAINS UPON MANKIND.
> MAN OFFERS NOT A SINGLE GOOD DEED TO RECOMPENSE HEAVEN.
> KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL. KILL.

[Zhang Xian-zhong believed that he himself was not a man, but the incarnation of a star sent down by the Jade Emperor to kill all men. And though he particularly relished the death of scholars, he also thought of himself, through a concidence of names, as the god of literature.] Yet what is most remarkable about Pol Pot is that, perhaps uniquely in history, he was a despot who erected no stones to himself, no "personality cults," no icons. He was the invisible ruler: both the throne and the power behind the throne.

In the absence of concrete information, I cast about for clues, and I land on his years in radio electronics. The radio leads me, like most roads, to poetry. Since the invention of radio it has become a frequent metaphor for the poetic process: the poet as vehicle of the muse has become the poet as antennae of the race. The words are out there; writing is a kind of "tuning in."

In this context, Ezra Pound's World War II broadcasts become a full-scale classical tragedy. Not the beliefs expressed and his Fascist partisanship; they were merely loathesome. What was tragic was this act of *hubris:* the poet attempting to become the muse.

Pol Pot too, remaining invisible, wanted to be (and became, as Pound never did) that bodiless Voice. It is the Voice that tells us to go on the mountain and slay our son; the Voice that tells us, suddenly, to kill a dozen people in a restaurant; the Voice that tells the thousands to erect the pyramids of sacrifice and the extermination camps; the Voice that sends us into battle. (How different is it, I wonder, from the Voice that dictates a line?) And more, he was the Voice that spoke to the voices that spoke: in Kampuchea all forms of communication were outlawed, except the radio. Yet Pol Pot himself was rarely, perhaps never heard.

To be not only poet, but the muse; to become inspiration itself. To be not only king, but kingship: to dissolve into pure power. It has been the dream of centuries: to become the invisible worm, the force that blocks reason and impels some poor peasant to run a bayonet through a child. Can such a story ever be known? What words could tell it?

[1982]

Two Greenlandic Folktales

(Tr. from the Greenlandic by Lawrence Millman)

THE FOX-WIFE AND THE PENIS OF THE LAKE

A man and his wife, and they lived all alone. Summers the man would go out and hunt in his kayak for long periods of time. Once, when the man came back, his wife was nowhere to be seen. It happened like this again and again; the wife would return home only after the husband. Then one warm day he told her he was going out in his kayak as usual. But instead he followed her and saw her come to a small lake, where she shouted: "Penis! Penis! Penis!" And then a huge penis emerged from the waters of the lake and his wife made love with it.

Now the man felt the greatest hatred for his wife. So it wasn't long before he went to the small lake again, alone, and there he shouted: "Penis! Penis! Penis!" At this the penis again appeared and the man beat it to death and cut it into small pieces with his hunting knife. Then he came home and proceeded to throw these penis-pieces into the meat pot. When they were cooked, he roused his wife: "Supper's ready . . . " The wife started to eat. "Hm-m-m, this tastes good," she said. "Well, it's your lover from the lake," he replied. At that she let out a moan and dropped to the earth, pulling her sleeping skins over her. Then the man gathered an assortment of blow-flies, maggots, and worms. These he placed beneath her sleeping skins. They ate her up entirely. And when there was nothing left, he set a fire and burned them all to death.

Now the man was all alone. He went out on his hunting trips as usual. But once he came back and there was meat in the pot and his kamiks had been mended and stockings put into them. The same thing happened again and again. One day, instead of leaving, he hid behind the tent. And he saw: a she-fox, quite handsome, her tail like a top-knot,

cooking up a pot of meat. She looked very happy. Soon, however, she caught sight of him and she began crying and pleading. It was to no avail. He captured her and made her his new wife. And she waited for him patiently when he was out hunting.

Then it happened that the two of them left for winter quarters. On their way they came across another married couple, a piece of shit and a rabbit, man and wife. And with this couple they decided to stay for the winter. It wasn't long before they had exchanged wives. The man lay with the rabbit and the piece of shit with the she-fox. But the fox said: "This place smells of shit!" And the piece of shit replied: "Whew, fox stink!" Upon hearing this, the little fox was quite upset and she vanished through a hole in the doorskin. The man had some harsh words with the piece of shit, for it seemed to him that it was responsible for his losing his new wife. "Well, you must go after her, then," the shit told him.

So the man set out and began to follow her tracks in the snow. He saw two sets of prints; on one side the footprints of a woman, and on the other the tracks of a fox. He followed these prints right up to a little cave. She's gone into this cave, he thought. So he called out to her: "Wife, Are you in there?" And then out of the cave came something that was half human and half blow-fly, saying: "Love me! Love me!" When the man said no, the creature went back in again. Then he called out once more for his wife. And now it was a she-maggot that came out, and it said: "Love me! Love me!" But the man would not have her, either. At last he entered the cave himself to retrieve his wife. Inside, there was only a worm. And this is what the worm said to him:

> "He who has burned me,
> he who has singed me,
> he who has murdered me,
> let him suffer the worst of sufferings."

Blow-fly, maggot, and worm—they were all creatures the man had destroyed. From then on, when he came back from his hunting, he was alone, quite alone.

UKUAMÂQ

There was a woman named Ukuamâq who desired her son's wife. The son was a great hunter and often he would be gone for many days at a time, hunting hooded seals. Once, while he was gone, Ukuamâq made herself a penis out of seal-bone and skins. She attached this penis to her waist and paid a call on the wife, who took one look at it and exclaimed: "How nice . . . " Then they slept together. Shortly thereafter Ukuamâq began to go out hunting, just like her son. And when she'd come back, she'd take off her clothes and flap her breasts up and down, saying: "Sleep with me, my dear little wife . . . "

It happened that the son returned and he saw his mother's seals lying in front of the house. "Whose catch is this?" he said to his wife.

"None of your business," she replied.

Now he was very suspicious of her. He dug a hole in the ground and hid there. Soon he saw his mother rowing home in her kayak, a seal in tow. It was a big hooded seal. Mother and son never never caught anything but big hooded seals. Ukuamâq reached the land and took off her clothes, then flapped her breasts up and down, saying: "My sweet wife, my dear sweet wife, kindly delouse me . . . "

Whereupon the son came out of his hole and struck his mother to the ground, so hard that he killed her. "Now," he said to his wife, "You must come away with me."

The wife would not come. "You have killed my husband, my dear husband," she cried. Then the son saw his mother's penis, fashioned from seal-bone and skins and very worn at the tip. He had no choice but to strike his wife dead, too.

The man went away and built a new house a great distance from this place. And there he sits to this day, happily delousing himself.

NOTE

Lawrence Millman writes: "I captured *The Foxwife and the Penis of the Lake* this summer in East Greenland from a seal hunter named Ib Brodersen. He told it to me first in Greenlandic (an Eskimo dialect) and then in Danish, which language I know—I've smoothed out the latter version which is the one you have. Doubtless it'll appear in my book of Greenlandic translations "Smell of Earth and Clay," to be published later this year by the White Pine Press.

It might interest you to know that the 'penis of the lake' motif is quite common in Arctic folklore. You will find variants of my story in books by Franz Boas and Knut Rasmussen about Arctic Canada. As nearly as I can tell, the 'shit' motif is peculiarly Greenlandic. Shit, wiping moss, urine—they are obsessions in the stories and songs of this island land. It's bound up in ways with the anal/urinary outlets, considered the entry places and exits of the human soul.

I'd like your readers to consider the Fox Wife tale less as a piece of eccentric ethnicity and more as simply a short story in its own right. Ever since my salad days among the Irish *senachies*, I've been convinced that the folktale is a legitimate species of 'short story,' only it happens to perform via plot what *The New Yorker* set pieces perform with brow-knit labour, verbal density, and so on. The Fox-Wife tale likewise seems to me to pre-empt and post-empt Freud in a single 3 page blow, while poor Ann Beattie is still struggling to get up from her shrink's couch.

Good to know that you're a fellow lower-body fetishist. I strongly recommend that you locate a copy of *Scatologic Rites of All Nations* by John G. Bourke. This is a veritable Bible of traits/customs/folklore all pertaining to anal and urinary functions, many religious, a few mundane. First published in the 1890s, it was a 'forbidden' book until a 1935 reissue by the American Anthropological Society. Bourke was a U.S. Cavalry Captain who sniffed about in Indian middens. From there he went on to such wonders as the admirers of the Dalai Lama who preserved his shit in amber. By comparison, I should say, Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* is rather hygienic.

In Eskimo folklore, when you have an animal or material object (like, for example, shit) lying with or conversing with a human, the assumption is that it's something *in human form*. In other words, amusing as the spectacle might seem, the piece of shit that makes love to the Fox-Wife is not intended to be an actual six-foot turd bringing her to orgasm and itself as well . . . The shit is a shit in human disguise, perhaps like so many others we know. But that penis haunts me because beyond doubt it is meant to be literal.

The polar Eskimos did not attach any stigma to natural functions or their spin-offs. Take the lowly fart, for instance. One story goes that a man swallowed a spear-point and broke wind against a herd of narwhals and the spear-point flew out his ass and penetrated each and every heart of every narwhal in that herd, thus dispatching the lot to cetacean heaven. Since that moment, the fart is mighty great magic in Eskimo lore if not in Eskimo life."

Karin Lessing

IN THE AVIARY OF VOICES

Someone

it wasn't you

said

Hello! Hello!

I could have killed
you

invisible, invisible
you

*

ambushed, I grow

feathers
in my throat

one
by one, I pluck them

while you

fly
safe

under the suave
plumage

*

in the aviary of voices

we speak the language the same

in and out / between staves

that

never touch we

tear

*

the trajectory within

memory

is space reconstituted with 'masks'

striae

over a blotted mouth

*

cry out did you

I

as far

as

archipelago sea-wedge, echo-

less

*

from the center

"kill"

a cleavage devours

this passion

*

I carry like a white fruit

what blinds me

no one not even

you

at arm's length, ir-
reversible

*

the irregular progression of forget-

fulness roots
in the eyes, beginning

there
gulls

on bare islands: '*mon amour! mon amour!*'

as white
on WHITE

obliterates

*

SAM MESSER

John Yau

Images of masks and stuffed birds, a spinal column bending under its own weight, like a Jack-in-the-box, or a skull grinning nastily out of a man's inward-gazing face—everything in Sam Messer's drawings and paintings seems to exist in a forlorn state. No hint of sunlight, no view of the outdoors affects the isolation, even through a window. Instead, a studio or room cluttered with *memento mori* forms the realm in which the inconsolable figure(s) go about their business.

During the last three years the artist (he is in his late 20's) has expanded his repertoire of direct references to include Goya, El Greco, Chaim Soutine, Picasso, and Pollock. However, unlike many artists of his generation who appropriate images for ironic purposes or to empty them of all meaning, Messer attempts to tap the spirit imbedded in them. Typically, this is achieved through juxtaposing his art historical references with his own interpolations—for example, the images of a bird-like mask impaled on a snake swallowing its own tail are placed over a contemporary version of Goya's nude *Maja* in *For When the Maja Comes* (1985). Rather than cancelling each other out, these images form an unexplained hierarchy.

Messer's method of juxtaposition works because he manages to posit them in a pre-rational world rather than a post-Modern one. The conflation between personal *memento mori* and the art historical images of a woman becomes a hall of mirrors in which a nostalgia for the past is obviated by an awareness of the present. In the fictive realm of these interiors, the woman exists both in the everlasting *here and now* and the ever growing *then and there*. Messer's drawings and paintings strive to rise out of the chasm formed by these two conditions.

Untitled
Charcoal on paper
38" x 48"

Courtesy: Ruth Siegel Gallery

Untitled
Charcoal/acrylic paint
50" x 90"
1984

after *"The Women from 'A'"*
Charcoal
22" x 30"

"Poker Face"
24" x 24"
Oil on linen
1984

"For When the Maja Comes"
92" x 94"
Oil on linen
1985

Mike Newell

Six Poems

TWADDLE IN A PUBLIC SHRINE

Vile entropy. Wretched moon.
In somber alliance we are caught unattentive beneath your sprig.
Burdened is the faint echo of our pulse.
Harangued by ghost light from vacant stars we clamor.
The festive mind marooned.
Imbroglio in the cafeteria.
Vicarious vicars of the study hall.
Dust from ancient bones shrills the blackboard.
But is eclipsed by the duty of shrikes
Who risk detention for gaucherie in the toilets.

FIRST FROST

Pooh the annual ballyhoo sponsored by ants!
Young men with sheathknives sweated to their hips gum Skoal
and drive backroads all Sunday
looking for coon hound pups that ran off.
Ha! Ask them to disengage in hoopla.

Even as wood smoke lazes from the chimney
there is still time to stroll with yellow straws between our teeth,
for the cows to dally around the salt lick, their whishing tails
counterpoint to the monotonous scuttlebutt of insects.

LAWN LIONS IN EARLY AUGUST

Often truckle scrouch or seemingly palpate within yards of chipped deer.
They can be viewed late Sunday mornings.
Take the shortcut from Bellvedere Lake
up the dirt road to the trailer.
An old man in decolletage will be shovelling lime from a wheelbarrow.
He has no time for palaver.
Selecting instead to gaze behind, whether the dust held down.

CHILDREN AT RECESS ARE LIKE SHIPS IN CHOPPY SEAS

When talent is squandered the world does not want to know why.
It wants to know where.
How many.
Longitude and latitude.
Under what conditions.
The prevailing winds.
In a strongbox or scattered.

I want to say
those treasure hunters around us who take notes
are not swarthy men born out of wedlock
with scars on their faces.
Nor are they holy men who neither taunt or gloat.
Nowadays they jog during lunch and live in snack-towns like Buffalo.

It is enough to know the world does not care where we go wrong.
Whether we go or stay is arbitrary.
Twin letters of recommendation and a high score decide nothing.
What is accomplished without need of either is more of a measure.

The cargo in the hold is always in the hold.
At worst it is only pirated from vessel to vessel.
Transfer does not detract from intrinsic value.
It remains even if out of our grasp.
Whether in pawnshops or museums.
(And pawnshops really are the pop museums of our culture.)

Our duty is to provide a current for those messages which are not meant
for us.
Without too many questions.
Like a smuggler whose fullest life is in ballads.

THE SOIL AROUND THE ROOT

The sound of missing a deadline takes time to gather.
Volcanic activity in Mexico springs mudslides in Utah a season later.
The mind becomes unsettled without apparent cause.

The cemetery was nearly two miles from the house on Mountain St.
Aunt Sue had invited me to take a walk with her after school.
The fragility in her vice felt like a lilac branch about to snap
from a late spring snowstorm.
She was a senior.
I was in grade school.

I wasn't close with Uncle Dick.
I remember him sharing kool-aid with me by the back screen door
after he had gotten the best of me until I cried.
I also recall a grass snake being dropped into a mayonnaise jar full of frogs
we had plucked from the unmowed lawn behind the house.
The only other distinct memory I have of Uncle Dick
is when he came home from a visit to the farm
his older brother Malcolm worked near Peru.
Uncle Dick was wheezing. Tears popped from his eyes.
He grimaced and blankly cried out as he walked.
I think Grampa and Uncle Ken were supporting him from either side.
Uncle Dick was naked except for a rose colored blanket half dragging,
half draped over his shoulders.

Uncle Dick would lie in the upstairs hall bedroom and wheeze.
(I always thought he was faking and sneaked upstairs to catch him
sliding off blankets piled into hay mounds.)
In that hallway bedroom Uncle dick labored until he died
at age 13 of rheumatic fever.

Aunt Sue and I turned up the dirt cemetery road.
On either side a marsh tore at the senses with erratic sights and sounds.
She began kicking a stone as we walked.

I started kicking one too.
I was ahead of her fiercely intent on my stone when she called out.
As I turned she kicked her stone to me.
I kicked it back.
This is how we came up the winding road
with me walking backwards.
The mute stone hopping between us.

THE QUIET MONOPOLY ALL POETS SHARE

Incessant yammering is the spirit's applause.
A guy wire supports and restrains without distinction.
The body hums at the slightest provocation.
Through irregular heating of the earth's skin the breeze stirs.
And so the body's incantations.
Commonly thought of as prescribed by wind
but also by fires, digestive tracts, webs of feet, and bushy tails
pollen migrates.

To inquire where the spirit first heard its song
is to disturb the dream
of swallows returning to neglected smokestacks in spring.
Of cranes to Creamer's Field in Fairbanks during breakup.
But these are the glamour species protected by faint notions of what we would become.

Who speaks for the hungry thing inside us that does not purr
after being fed, that imitates bird droppings
to avoid detection, and is laced with disagreeable odors.
Our eyes are drawn like maggots to syllables which squirm like convulsing carrion.
It is here the body breeds.
What prospers is not always erotic moths.
Houseflies have wings too.

To be the dream is not just to travel with the albatross by starlight
over huge expanses, it means also to implant
your kind like the ichneumon wasp in paralyzed larvae.
All the body loves has a bit of nonsense to it.
What lies in wait might have scales.
What breaks the plane momentarily might feed on worms.

Often the body vibrates incessantly.

Benjamin Peret

Four Poems from *Je Sublime*

Tr. from the French by
Rachel Stella and John Yau

THE SQUARE OF THE HYPOTENUSE

First flower of the chestnut tree rising like an egg
in the heads of metal men
hard as a jetty
when during the rain of ink soaking me with mirrors
your eyes magic like a butchered tree
scream at every pitch
I am Rosa
I love you as the fern of former times loves the stone
        which has made it an equation
I love you like a hug
I love you like a red frying pan in a cavern
Let your barbed wire dress
tear me with a loud racket of dishes falling down the stairs
I love you like an ear carried off by the wind
which whistles Wait
Wait until the iron has burned the shirt of dew
to make the reflection of crystal hidden in a drawer
        bloom there
wait for the soap bubble
after bursting like a czar of moles
which will never cover the beloved shoulders
to be reborn in the dust assassinated by the sun turned blue

and which I spy through the keyhole
hairy
frozen
from the prison of polar lichens where you have incarcerated me
wait threads of salt
wait cliff wine which has just crushed a sunday school
wait viscera of phosphorus which thinks only of forest fires
wait

I wait

I

Among the desires simple as a salad rising above the tall trees
drowned tomorrow in the cement spat out by bakers
who haven't any more chin hairs than a shrimp has money boxes
among all those grapes reminding me of a beggar
        at the door of a townhouse
two eyes of stone turned blue by the last quarter
slowly eat mushrooms growing peacefully
inside the little map of the world
animated by the alcohol of your voice where fireflies dance
Should a pale barberry sun rise across the large wheel of your lashes
which only knows how to grind coffee now
which I'd like to drink like a funnel I mean marzipan
larger than your image in the cupboard where I try to sleep
but which loses itself in a haunted cemetery
like a can of condensed milk in a lime kiln
and I reap the cobblestones more clearly than a flight of damsels
crossing a cloud of Greek flags faded
as a pickle preserved since my grandfather's death
should a reflection appear in a glass of bordeaux
in the countryside where I look for myself like a dog
        chasing its tail
and the central brigades of radios
which ordinarily know only how to grumble like funerals
will hum in my ears open like a seashell about to burst
Rosa is here

A H

When breathless as a drunken eiderdown
I will fall like a pot of boiling oil in a history of France
you will stay on the edge of the floorboards which don't yet dare crack
to make eyes at the phantoms tramping in their furrows
and fighting like weathervanes in an amusement park
where the massacre of the games prepares the burning
        of diamond rivers
and the loons in a soil of sour milk
you will stay like a fountain of turquoises amidst
        a hecatomb of blacks
bristling with feathers from bishop-headed crows
so that the bank explodes like a crepe that sticks to the ceiling
But it would suffice if your spring shower gaze on a town
        of Leyden jars
colored itself with the first sun of the year seen
        through drawn blinds
so that from the furzy moor inhabited by rusted saucepans
        there spurts
a forest of baobabs with minister pendants and nebula necklaces
crisscrossed by the flight of great fire birds
lost from the start
lost at the finish
But this will not be because the shouting star has plunged itself
into the head of a comet which says No
the way the stationmaster's flag makes the locomotive lather
and the cops' bullets whistle around me
Liberté liberté chérie
sung to the air of chinese lanterns
like a brake which grinds a cauliflower song

NEBULA

When the night of butter leaving the churn
drowns the train station moles whose eyes trumpet
and grow larger like an approaching subway stop
and cloak themselves in your image
that turns in my head like a heliotrope crazed by seasickness
all the collar buttons jump like sheep perched on a powder magazine
and throw big spurts of neckties into the distance
but you pass like a current of dew-charged air with the handles
of a smoldering lamp
and you close the door which makes the noise of a spade
burying a potato
the door of a mine shaft
the door of an irredentist province
where I prowl in the whirlwind of your gazes
that turn the trees green again and blue between them
unable to stop opening demolition yards in the middle of forests
where the most beautiful breasts in the world separate to shout
No
while ruffling their tresses of black sun
illuminating a storm crossing the causeway
when the waterdrop of your feet places itself there
like a busy signal in an ear
that the waiting has made into a sentry box inhabited by gnawing rats
before it becomes a laundry boat beached on a desert island
or a sailboat forgotten in a pullman car
No is only a bunch of radishes drying like some president
or other of the republic
until they are transformed into a white and deserted square
bordered by palaces of fluorescent mica
where
amidst battering rams rusted
and devoured by flowering honeysuckle
suddenly will squirt a column of blood and forget-me-nots
in the shape of your hands and wearing phosphorus yesses
creating around them huge aurorae boreali of ostrich plumes
and peaches
amplifying themselves like a sea you don't want to cross
and which yaps at your feet like a conch
where the echo of your voice is found again

Geoffrey O'Brien

TIBET

The museum founders.

I keep taking my mask off to reveal the mask under the mask.

It took all day to make the incision.

Whose idea was it to put a tunnel here?

The shape of the water is almost coherent.

A snap, the yellow's gashed.

Now he will sing the song of the teeth.

The carving of a spark amounts to a bewildered wall.

Lip answering lip and eyes eyes all across the pond.

Too fragile: they've reluctantly said goodbye to your platform.

It ends between them, between each of them.

That was no cavern, that was a filter.

What flutters in the spectrum is your blood.

The bird burrows in the skeletal air.

The price of soil is ash.

The fires burn up the whispers and the morning washes them.

.

The gilded edge wants to suggest a flicker.

.

I worship destruction.

.

Blue is bottomless and red is bottomless but not at the same time.

.

At the same time the army invades and the calves shudder.

.

There was a room in which I am standing.

.

How far did the wind travel to find a container?

.

The mountain formed out of sheer laziness.

.

If I can stop humming I will remind you.

.

A knob of bone rounds.

.

Smoke settles in the trail.

August Kleinzahler

Five Poems

BY THE TAGUS

With fond Jean in the pastelaria at closing
coffee ends
as did the Roman, Visigoth & Moor
in a weird apse
bastard tile

A white peacock screams
from the castle above
then tears the night apart once more

Love *Love*

How it scalds the rainbow pheasant
ibex dove flamingo

Love

in the castle garden

Love

in a searing cry

dragging its spur through the harbor night

then gone
in a suturing breeze

EVENING, IN A MINOR

Methane is coming off them.
they pick at the rind
till worms find good jelly.
A muzz of voices, bonding —
a cloud, a caul, a cowl:
an atmosphere of sorts.
Wolf valence.

I know a pocket:
lily dust on the table,
cat in the fog.
It's the world turned us out
before the membrane blew
and virus loose,
shards of toy biting anything pith.

A mutation, bless us,
till the sun undoes.
An isle —
plenty crayfish, lots bananas.
And . . .
Segovia,
Segovia playing Fernando Sor.

WORKOUT, WITH NIB

Incise
the sheath of silky air,
fuchsia, gold

The locus you don't want —
break there
or it breaks

Foetid, burning —
after each angle worked,
deal made . . .

Over you,
flesh bubbling up
like paint off a board

Très cher, trop cher —
each beam shivering
loose of its joint

Boy
with a flame
in a river of cicadas

That spot, there
break it,
there

Fat
jumping in the sausage skin —
burst it

Get in,
pay the bill,
get out

YE OLDEN BARGE

As Plot rounded the corner
ants got him,
twirling in his sugar and pith

took the ground out
from under him,
tunneling, putting down eggs

dismantled the protein church
within sight of Denouement —
no ride.

To get from here to there
in the grand curve,
every inch a storm of bites . . .

POPPIES IN THE WIND

The honeybee
painting himself his delight inside her
the both of them
adrift
tossing in fits of wind
petals of her knees
raised up around him
petal arms
encircling in shadow his cameo'd frenzy
hosts of them
open or clenched
waving
sheathed or half out
of their witch-hats
at May's meridian
drying like chicks in the air

Brent MacKay

Five Poems

SIX DAYS OVERDUE

A foot stretches
beneath your breast
as pink stars fall
from all the ships
blasting the date:

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

City of Camelot

Sunny Spanker

Sweet Sultan

Pacific Swan

Diana

Amazon

undo the night
like giants
yelling their brains out.

(Citizens
are trumpeting from windows
jumping
on rooftops
as our unborn child
hiccups and rolls
and we toast
the morning
waiting)

World Dove

New Apollo

BABY JAZZ

Just one thought tattoo'd like a starmap
to the hot sky of your skull and no one
on the road between here and space shooting
straight out East off the end of everything
familiar in a tincan beater choked and floored
with a kick and curse to go up and over the
river in its pale metalskin to where you cant
park standing on air so dont even think stop
cause there's no wheel on the ground no peel
on the rind just a semi burning the cold steam of a
Pacific disturbance into a turbine of confused molecules
spinning like tightly squeezed Birdman notes
doing their best to rearrange you and yours into
pieces of landscape in a blinding blend of radial
blowout and venturi effect while the contraction
list looks more and more like the countdown in a
time signature so weird no baton can say here you
rest there you go slowly and quietly with one steady
breath at first filling the abdomen and chest
relaxed as the photograph of the coach and his wife
in the middle chapters of Pregnancy Birth and
Recovery in all that on the ground luxury
man o man
here I am with a pocketful of dental floss trying
to picture biting the cord at the side of the road
with perhaps a steamy milkcow or saddlehorse giving
us the big knowing eye from across a fence.

*

Electric hyperventilated thunder tension contracting
back to back all Friday afternoon. Cement clouds puttied
to the mountainside weigh less than this clock buzzing
four minutes before every hour. Rain falls on the sill.
Magnetic skin contortions north to south spin the spine
link by link. We dangle between breathing.

*

Life is a room (at night) a drifting cube full
of whom we choose (at times) quiet as light from
a wooden lamp.

(At night) life drifts off the mountainside lit
by cubes of light in rooms full of time.

The air is full of cubes full of time drifting
into night.

Wet with rain we choose (at times) a room the
light of life drifts to quiet as night.

This night full of light in a room full of life
is love's to choose.

(At times) love drifts in quiet as light.

A star in a room drifting into life.

FARE-THE-WELL

Some cant say thanks
or shake a hand

they take dont
what they blink can

to make an end:

a watch a wallet
a warmed-over chop

(each the same
same to each)

a hardspun dread
without a friend
in sight.

ANGLE IRON

So odious
though public
a thing
as to suggest
control by
grip

the coming
and going
of rightful air
down the pipe
of any man
as if jet-fresh
oxygen
kept moist
the sack of
life in moments
of passion
without irritation
or registration
of ejaculation
on forms
a forest fell for.

Common
pyramid
crumbs
crust lash
and tongue
in days
atomic
each life
happily lives
approximating
nothing worse
than monotonous
commerce
piling up
and pulling
down.

Each man tastes
willow yellow
tallow of time
and greed
at least once
like there's
no tomorrow
and nothing else
but to swallow
a burning wick.

But fish
for example
dont logic
swallow
or wallow toxic
in uncertain
water
circling the
signature
of each rhythmic
life.

Unoffended
and otherwise
natural movement
depends on the
evolution
of efficiency
where least
effort inclines
head or wing
heron perfect
in liquid aspect
to a kinesis
continuous of
life.

POLITICS

The defaced sign
of the fascist candidate
gave me hope

A block later
I was called an asshole
and offered a fight

In broad daylight
dogs shitting
at an end of rope.

Ron Padgett

Four Poems

GOETHE

When Kenneth Koch
picked up a black camel
so neatly with his fingertips
and held it to the light —
yellow and red plaid,
and several dozen of those jackets please —
the face of the earth
had shadowy clouds over it,
tall hay waving in the wind
and pleasant adjectives alongside the brook.
Some airplanes appeared
but they were only one inch long
and so far away you have to smile
because some yellow triangles
have entered the air,
sent by the goddess of Geometry,
and whose figures are transparent
like our souls, sort of existing
and not existing at the same time.

THE WAY OF ALL HANDWRITING

As long as there is hair on the human head
And people wish to arrange it
There will be combs.

But I don't want to sign my autograph,
I want to follow a coil
Down into my desire
To fall face first
Into a blue-green swimming pool
The shape and size of my own body,
So the joke will fly away from my physiognomy
And the steel strings that hold it to my interior monologue
Fall into the ionisphere
where even combs go when they die,
Perfected, like first crayons,
Bright basic colors.

THE LITTLE PAST MIDNIGHT SNACK

On the big oak table I lay out a fresh peach on a white dish, some provolone, a knife, a glass, and a bottle of white wine. As I turn to go back into the kitchen I glance sideways at these objects. It is a Fairfield Porter painting come to life, and a painting *of* Fairfield Porter come to life. Because for just that moment he was there. He was there in the casual arrangement of beautiful things in daily life, and in the impulse to say something direct about them.

When I looked at the bread in the kitchen it reminded me of French bread, such as the funny *baguette*, and of the year I spent in Paris, among the *baguettes*. I was always happy there, even when I was said, and I'm always happy to be there. There must be unhappy people in Paris, but I don't understand them. It sounds crass, but it's like what John Havlicek said near the end of his athletic career: "I can honestly say that I have never been tired in my life." How could anyone not be happy in Paris?

How could anyone not love Fairfield Porter? Or the food on my table?

WHO AND EACH

I got up early Sunday morning
because it occurred to me that the word
which
might have come
from a combination of who and each
and reached for the *OED*
which for me
(I think of it not
as the *Oxford English Dictionary*
but as the *O Erat Demonstrandum*)
has the last word:
"Hwelc, huelc, hwaelc, huaelc, huoelc, hwaelc, wheche, weche,
whech, qwech, queche, qheche, qwel, quelk, hwilc, wilc,
hwilch, wilch, whilc, whillc, whilk, whylke, whilke, whilk,
wilke, whylk, whilk, quilc, quilke, qwilk, quylk, quhylk,
quilk, quhilk, hwic, wic, hwich, wyche, wich, hwych, wiche,
whiche, whyche, wych, whych, which, quiche, quyche, quich,
quych, qwiche, qwych, quhich, hwylc, hwulch, hulch, wulc,
whulc, wulch, whulche":
Teutonic belching.

But in little tiny type: "For the compounds *gewilc, aeghwilc,* see *Each.*"

Now, if you want to talk *belching*. . . .

It was raining outside
with the blue-gray hiss of tires
against the wet street
I would soon walk my dog in,
the street I drove an airplane up
earlier this morning in a dream
in which the Latin word *quisque* appeared to me,
as if it meant *each which*
in the sea of *eisdem, quicumque,* and *uterque.*

Thus I spend my days,
waiting for my friends to die.

HOWARD BUCHWALD

John Yau

Howard Buchwald's paintings examine contrary avenues of visual access simultaneously. There is his subjective elaboration of the Renaissance notion of the "cone of sight," as well as his rational dissembling of Modernism's insistence on flatness, universal formats, and the purity of the object. The focus of this examination, always from a personal and even eccentric point of view, is the irresolvable conflict between the "claim" of objectivity and the subjective ambition that is implicit in every perspectival system. By undermining both Renaissance and Modernist tradition to the point where they meet in enraptured tension, Buchwald achieves a stable fluidity in his paintings. In order to achieve this state of tension, the artist breaks his compositional process down into two distinct phases.

The first phase consists of determining the format to be worked on, planning the various cuts to be made, holes to be drilled, and the incisions connecting these holes. These marks are derived from Buchwald's analysis of the Renaissance convention that decress the picture to be a "window"—a plane slicing through our "cone of sight." Rather than connecting this "cone of sight" to an object(s), he returns it to the viewer's space. The holes are arbitrarily chosen points, and are meant as literal examples of where sight pierces the window of the picture plane. The center of sight they imply is pointed to by the angles with which these holes are drilled. Pairs of holes are then connected by curving paths. In the paintings these paths or incisions are brought about by leaving the canvas visible, untouched by paint. As sections of a circle, they not only imply a center of sight, but they also track the way our sight moves over the surface of the painting.

The drawing is a blueprint for the foundation of the painting. The holes, cuts, and paths form a structure upon which Buchwald will both build and react against. One of the ways he obviates the controlled format is by laying down translucent bands of paint. This luminous field is, in turn, commented upon by the unpainted paths. Paint becomes both a

Courtesy of the
Nancy Hoffman Gallery, New York
Photo credit: Zindman/Fremont

Untitled
Oil on linen 74½" x 100"
1981

literal skin and a concious means of implying spatial density. By carefully dissembling and recombining different perspectival systems, Buchwald reveals the artificiality of the painting, both as surface and as object. Viewers are confronted by an incompleteness that takes their participation into account.

Untitled
Pencil on museum board
40" x 60"
1983

Untitled
Pencil on museum board
38" x 59"
1983

Charles Bernstein

POUNDING FASCISM

(Appropriating Ideologies—Mystification, Aestheticization, and Authority in Pound's Poetic Practice)

> I don't know how humanity stands it
> with a painted paradise at the end of it
> without a painted paradise at the end of it
>
> —Pound, *Canto 74*

The virulent antisemitism and fascism that is not only at the core of Ezra Pound's political beliefs but also taints his poetry and poetics can be excused, moderated, or rationalized only at the expense of all such special pleading: willed ignorance allowing for a continuing reign of totalitarianism masking as authority, racism posing as knowledge, and elitism claiming the prerogatives of culture. The ingenuity of exceptions made for friends—aesthetic fellow travellers or political allies—leads readily to the global hypocrisy of, for instance, the official U.S. policy of distinguishing between the benign "authoritarianism" of Pinochet's Chile and the malignant "totalitarianism" of Jaruzelski's Poland.

But perhaps the greatest danger in an account of Pound's fascism is not that he will be given an unearned pardon by literary history but that his guilt is bracketed off from our own. For Pound's fascism is all-too-

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Presented at a panel on "Pound and Fascism," Modern Language Association convention, Washington, D.C., on December 29, 1984. The panel was moderated by Carroll F. Terrel and included Christine Froula and Robert Casillo.

easily censured, as by slap on hand, while the fascist ideas that infect his poetry and poetics seep unnamed into the orthodox cultural theory and criticism of this society.

Pound's fascism, far from hindering the canonization of his poetry by American literary culture, has been a major factor in its acceptance. For stripped of its obnoxious overtness, Pound's fascism becomes the stern but fatherly voice of authority, measuring by the Pound standard the absolute worth of the cultural production of all the societies of earth, the ultimate Core Curriculum. Without its righteously Eurocentric and imperiously authoritative undercurrent, the formal innovations of Pound's poetry would have contributed to its marginalization. This is evident from the relative marginalization of much of the formally innovative poetry of, sic, "The Pound era." Pound's status, far from being jeopardized by his political ideas, is enhanced by them.

I do not, however, equate Pound's politics with Pound's poetry. *The Cantos,* and other of Pound's work, are in many ways basically at odds with the tenets of Pound's fascist ideals. In this sense, Pound has systematically misinterpreted the nature of his own literary production; refused, that is, to recognize in it the process he vilified as usury and Jewishness. This blindness to the meaning of his work, to how in significant ways it represented what he claimed to most revile, not only contributed to the rabidness of his dogmaticism but also to the heights of magnificent self-deception and elegiac confusion that is *The Cantos* at its best.

There is a price to be paid for poetry; its practice can poison as fatally as sniffing glue or inhaling coal dust. Madame Curie did not know about the lethal aftereffects of invisible radiation when she conducted her experiments; we know from her experience that there are risks that cannot be prevented until after the first victims have made the effects visible. Is cultural megalomania a symptom of being overwhelmed by the incommensurable and intractable autonomy of fragments, that will not submit to a unitary measure, hierarchically predetermined, but which insist on making their own time and space, their own poem: never yielding to the totalizing of the autocratic arbitration of their place but allowing their own whole to come into being, not Coherence on the Pound standard, but a coherence of the displaced—disseminated and desecrated—making a home where it is to be found, where it occurs?

Pound, or part of him, wished to control the valuation of the materials he appropriated by arranging them in such a way that an immanent or "natural" order would be brought into being. As Pound seems to acknowledge in the final movements of the poem, *The Cantos* never jell in this way. For Pound, this was a measure, no matter how ambivalent he may have been about the evaluation, of the failure of *The Cantos.* In contrast, the success of *The Cantos* is that their coherence is of a kind

totally different than Pound desired or could—in his more rigid moments—accept. For the coherence of the "hyperspace" of Pound's modernist collage is not a predetermined Truth of a pancultural elitism but a product of a compositionally decentered multiculturalism.

Pound's great achievement was to create a work simultaneously using ideological swatches from many social and historical sectors of his own society and an immense variety of other cultures. This complex, polyvocal textuality was the result of his search—his unrequited desire for—deeper truths than could be revealed by more monadically-organized poems operating with a single voice and a single perspective. But Pound's ideas about what mediated these different materials are often at odds with how these types of textual practices actually work in *The Cantos.*

Pound's fascist ideology insists on the author having an extraliterary point of "special knowledge" that creates a phallic order (these are Pound's terms) onto the female chaos of conflicting ideological material. As Robert Casillo points out in his study of Pound's antisemitism, Pound contrasts the phallocentric/logocentric unswerving pivot (citing Wang in Canto 97: "man's phallic heart is from heaven / a clear spring of rightness") with the castrated and nomadic Jew. For Pound, Jews are the purveyors of fragmentation and therefore of the dissolution of fixed hierarchical cultural values (the Jews, says Pound on the radio, want to "blot out the classics, blot out the record"). Again, Jews, as usurers and in league with the Commies, represent "an indistinct, rootless, destructive mass" eroding the agrarian ideal of homestead, of Nature and private property (values Pound equates with order, clarity, *telos).**

For Pound, Jews "as 'falsification incarnate' [aim] to distort, misrepresent, and conceal language, to 'castrate' literature, origins, and tradition [and] are largely responsible for introducing abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, equivocation, ambiguity, and allegory into language." As Casillo goes on to note, Pound charges that the Kabbalistic Jews introduced allegorical interpretation into the West and so distracted men—this is Pound speaking—"from the plain sense of the word, of the sentence." As Casillo concludes, "Pound turned to Fascism because he shares not only its deep fear of indeterminacy [of the vague, inchoate, and incommensurable, of all that is mysterious or ambiguous or unknown] but also its central desire, which is to banish the indeterminate from social life. . . . And, as in Fascism, in Pound's work the ultimate sign of such fearful [indefiniteness] is the Jew."

What grotesque views for someone whose work is filled with indeterminacy, fragmentation, abstraction, obscurity, verbiage, equivocation,

*Citations in this and the next paragraph are from Casillo's "Anti-Semitism, Castration, and Usury in Ezra Pound," in *Criticism,* XXV:3 (1983). His conclusion is quoted from his *The Genealogy of Demons: Anti-Semitism, Fascism, and the Myths of Ezra Pound* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1985).

ambiguity, allegory; who has made the highest art of removing ideologies from their origins and creating a nomadic economy for them whose roots are not in the land or in property but in the abstraction of aestheticization and the irresolution of the jarring multicentric harmonies of incommensurable sounds. As Richard Sieburth has noted, the ultimate irony of *The Cantos* is that all its irreconcilable elements can be reconciled only in the abstract, by the authority of the author, *on credit.*** Indeed, the real economy of *The Cantos* is the one Pound constantly struggled to repress: the economy of reader and writer and book; the economy of language not as Logos but as exchange. Overall, *The Cantos,* despite Pound's ravings within it, represents less the crude economism of Pound's fascism, "with a painted paradise at the end of it," than a utopian chaos of a negative dialectic, "without a painted paradise at the end of it."

The technology of Pound's textual practice created its own logic of desire that Pound could not derail without giving up an achievement beyond the comprehension of his small-minded, penurious political accounting system. He was obviously unsatisfied with anything but a complexly polyphonic style and as a result did not allow his ideological predilections to completely compromise the scope of his formal innovations, especially since he was still able to inject his viewpoint into the poem ad nauseam. But the power of his method—his poetic ear above his spouting mouth—was such that his rantings are absorbed into *The Cantos* not as their truth but as befouled rubble, not as privileged material but as debased material, framed and denounced by those readers able to pick and choose for themselves. The center could not hold because the formal innovations of openly juxtaposing radically different materials undercut this possibility. The autonomy of the appropriated materials could not be sufficiently compromised without destroying the poetic power of the text, something Pound was on the whole unwilling to do. The authority, then, is not in Pound's opinions but in *The Cantos* itself—a situation Pound responded to not with insight or acknowledgment but with hysteria, paranoia, and megalomania. Having created a text so rich with tones that it could not be controlled in terms of traditional criteria of coherence and unity, Pound redoubled his effort to master an authority his textual practice had made impossible. The result was the claustrophobic reaction formation of Pound's worldview. In the struggle for control, Pound's methods and materials routed Pound's authority and preconceptions;

**Sieburth, "The Economy of Poetry / The Poetry of Economy," presented at The Humanities Institute, University of California, Berkeley, October 12, 1984. Sieburth's immensely lucid and cogent essay integrates Pound's economic ideas with other themes and motifs in *The Cantos,* making a convincing case for the spillage among, and interdependence of, the different metaphoric systems of the poem. I am indebted to his reading at several points in this account.

poisoned by this discontinuity, the straws he grasped for were reductivist economism and Fascisti racism.

Confronted with a superabundance of competing cultural practices and claims of knowledge, exacerbated by the escalation of available information about the present and past, responses can range from the humble to the arrogant. Pound's views about the authority of tradition (as he defined it) and the poet's role as arbiter of the hierarchical values of cultural artifacts is not remarkably incongruent with the dominant, if highly contested, ideologies of American universities (the great ideas), communications media (exclusion of all but those defined as mainstream), and government ("cops of the world")—despite Pound's own belief that Mussolini did it better. But while these institutions maintain their ideologies largely by avoiding direct confrontation among disparate material, Pound propounded a highly staged alternative approach. No doubt for Pound the poetic methods of *The Cantos,* by dint of the scope of appropriation and juxtaposition, were intended to go beyond any other in establishing the supremacy of the values in which Pound believed. But only delusions of grandeur—an arrogance beyond proportion—could have convinced the poet that he was capable of making value judgments on all the material included, and excluded, from *The Cantos.* Yet it is Pound's self-deceiving arrogance, and not *The Cantos'* refusal to be subsumed by it, that has largely secured Pound's stature; that is, prevented the subversiveness of *The Cantos'* methodology from undermining the false authority Pound and many of his supporters claim for his criticism and poetry. When we read *The Cantos* with the full incredulity it demands, as a text filled with systematic self-delusions and fragmentary illuminations, with magnificent gleanings and indulgent fraudulences, we will find not the mastertext of modernism but the wreck of Enlightenment rationalism: scarred remnants of a struggle among the divine, the satanic, and the ordinary—a text made beautiful by its damages and ugly by its claims of knowledge.

So I do not wish to back away from the methods of *The Cantos*; fascism, even in the hands of a poet so consummately resourceful as Pound, could not, finally, claim these methods for itself. But neither do I wish to ignore the warning implicit in these considerations: that aesthetic processes can be used for a variety of purposes, that to understand a work requires, in part, interrogating its motivations and social context. it is always revealing to ask of a work: who does it serve and how. The answer to this question, however, is not identical to what the worker's intentions may be. A response to this challenge is that some work may usefully evade any single social or political claims made for or against it because of the nature of its contradictions, surplusses, and negations. Perhaps this is the most positive thing that might be said of Pound's poetical works.

But perhaps fascism has won the day, anyway. When Pound the

great artist is excused for his politics, fascism has won. When Pound's politics are used to categorically discredit the compositional methods of his poetry, fascism has won. When Pound's poetry is exalted and his politics dismissed as largely irrelevant to his achievement, fascism has won. When Pound's politics are condemned, his poetry acknowledged or ignored in passing, but sanitized forms of his ideas prevail—the virtue of authority, property, and the homestead (a.k.a "family values"), the sanctity of the classics, the condemnation of the nonstandard in favor of "the plain sense of the word," and the divine right of the West (or East) to harness and bleed the rest of the world—fascism has won.

Pound's inflammatory rhetoric would, perhaps, be better met by calmed reason. But it is the nightmare of this tale that an exorcism cannot be initiated until the teller, also, has been implicated in the tale. And then, a waking moment brings the solace of explanation and rationalization, but not understanding; and then this wakefulness becomes more horrible than sleep. The outrage is not without, as if one could be shielded from contamination by the balm of historical contextualization, but within oneself. It is not that it is prudent to fight fire with fire, but that one burns.

Perhaps William Carlos Williams, writing in an early issue of *Furioso* [vol. 1, no. 2], says it better: "We all like to believe we are master minds. But what men seldom learn is that the end of poetry is the poem; I don't know a thing about the value of a poem as such or a hunk of gold as such or of a man himself as such but I do know *that.*"

The questions raised by these remarks are not meant to be resolved but to dog us into the present, where, in transfigured form, they remain pertinent and nagging. The use of preexisting or source or found materials in poetry and the other arts remains an occasion for political concern. Are these materials permitted to exist in and for themselves as inviolable artifacts—or are they appropriated into a frame that invests them with specified meaning determined by the author's own ideological position? Or are they debauched and defused as mere codes, empty signifiers—trophies for a postmodernist library? The double bind of an impossible universal or historical truth versus a fraudulent narrative invention is no more than the shadow play of those who do not wish to live in any here or any now. It is possible for poetry to make the consciousness-constituting activity of ideology audible, to respect the origins of words and to invent new worlds for them. This project persists.

Jackson Mac Low

PIECES O' SIX — IX

Diana injected the white-and-black cat with a tranquilizer. Anne massaged the frail leg where the needle'd gone in. She wanted to soothe it. A game was going on wherein each player had a cat and either dropped it or hit it on the head. Anne wasn't playing the game. It seemed rather cruel, and the white-and-black cat resented it. So Diana injected the tranquilizer and Anne massaged it. She couldn't stop the game, so she did the best she could. That was all there was to that. There was no replay. It wasn't the kind of thing most people'd want to see again. One couldn't get back to it anyway. Just as well. There was no way of knowing if the white-and-black cat had been dropped or hit on the head. Just as well. It wasn't the kind of thing most people'd want to know anyway. There wasn't any way even to begin to find out. That was just as well, for hardly anyone'd want to. It had certainly been cruel, and the white-and-black cat had been right to resent it. Diana hadn't ought to've injected it. It didn't need a tranquilizer. It needed to get out of the game. That's what the other cats ought to've done too. They didn't need tranquilizers either. They ought to've gotten out of the game. They must've resented it too. If they didn't act up enough to be injected with a tranquilizer, it must've been because they were afraid. Could it have been that they were afraid of being injected? Of course it could. It might have happened before. Any of them might have been injected. Only a very stupid cat or a highly insensitive one would not have resented it. What cat likes being dropped or hit on the head? Some cats like being hit on the head very lightly—that's called "patting." But that's different. That's not like being hit on the head any old way as part of a game. What kind of a cat wouldn't feel—if not show—resentment at such treatment? And what kind of people would do such things to cats? Cruel ones, obviously. Or if not cruel ones, stupid

or insensitive ones. Onlookers must have been helpless to stop the game. They couldn't do more than try to soothe the frightened cats. They couldn't learn the tranquilizer's name. For all anyone knows, it might have had side effects. It might have killed some brain cells! That's no small matter for cats. They don't have many to begin with. More than some other animals. Crabs, perhaps, or snails. But not enough to be able to lose a few lightly. Just hitting them on the head might have done damage. Who knows what a hit on the head could do to a cat? Just think of the delicate nerves inside those frail little crania! Even just dropping a cat might not be harmless. Instinctively most cats break falls with their legs. They land on their feet and seem little the worse. But if dropped too hard, or especially if *thrown* down, a cat can be damaged and yet seem little the worse. And a cat with a damanged brain from being injected or hit on the head may well have lost the reflexes that help it to land on its feet and break its fall. The ones that didn't resent the game or show that they did might have been damaged already. They might have already lost too many brain cells. A few key neurons might have been put out of commission. Even if other parts of the brain can take over functions of damaged parts and other neurons substitute for ruined ones, who could say a cat in such a condition was good as new? The white-and-black cat was no fool. Diana was a fool for doing what she did, and all of the players were fools and certainly cruel. The onlookers ought to've stopped the game. But that might not have been easy. Anyone playing a game like that might not be safe to interfere with. Some of them might have done *worse* to the cats or even harmed those who protested. They might have been hard to stop. But some might have listened to reason. They might have been persuaded in time to stop. Then they might have brought the others over. It would have required a skillful rhetorician—probably one who could deal with inebriated people. The players of that game must have been drugged or drunk. Most people wouldn't have played it even if they were. Many a well-meaning onlooker might have bungled it. Depending on the players' condition, they might have done worse—far worse. That white-and-black cat might not have come out of it alive! Maybe it was just as well that Anne just did her best to soothe it. It might have lost a few brain cells from the injection. But her not doing *too* much might have prevented worse. Think of what the atmosphere must have been like! A bunch of woozy hopped-up people playing a game. Little they cared that the pawns were sentient beings like themselves. Some might have played a similar game with people. Plenty of cases like that are known. Many have had worse outcomes. Some have led to murder. Cats can't talk. At least, they can't talk in court. (If a cat could talk, to paraphrase Wittgenstein, we wouldn't understand it.) When the players lose interest in the game, the cats can slink under furniture. They may sit there trembling awhile and not come out when they're called, but if

they aren't injured—beyond, that is, losing those brain cells or neurons—sooner or later they'll foray for food and water. They'll leave their hiding places and return to their dishes and bowls. They'll even beg from some of the people who'd played the stupid game with them. But a *person* might go to the police. Damages might be sought or criminal charges preferred. Red and flustered, they'd stammer their tale to a desk sergeant or patrolman. A detective might call on the host and ask painful or embarrassing questions. The people who'd played with people that way would be rounded up. They'd be asked what drugs they'd taken and where they'd gotten them. Their houses would be searched, their stashes seized. Even if they didn't land in jail, their assets would be squandered on lawyers. The temptation to quiet murder—especially if bribery didn't work—might prove irresistible. Even the cat game might have had repercussions. An onlooker might have tattled. A participant might have mentioned it in passing. It could have reached the ear of the ASPCA. A younger legal eagle there might have tested fledgling wings by filing a suit or pressing charges. How well it would have gone over in the public relations department! The fund raisers would have loved it. Photos—posed, of course, but admittedly so—could have helped to fill a four-page money-begging letter. A sympathetic judge could've thrown the book at the players. The white-and-black cat, dainty and petite, might have been subpoena'd. Its owners might have pleaded they were absent from the scene or helpless against the drug- or drink-sodden players. It's they that might've brought the suit if they'd've returned too early, and found the game in progress. Angry and betrayed, it's they that might've stopped the game, clearing out their wobbling erstwhile friends, cleaning the stinking ashtrays, flushing forgotten stashes down the toilet, throwing out paper cups or washing evil-smelling glasses, hunting out the cringing little creature, tempting it with dainties, soothing it with petting, letting it jump at will on chairs and laps to perch and purr. But they might not've gone to the ASPCA after all. They'd have to be unreasonably angry to bring that much trouble on themselves. Enough to have to clean up the shit of the cats their so-called friends had brought (and hopefully taken away) and to cure their own cat's trauma. If the little white-and-black cat wasn't "really" injured, no one would gain from bringing suit, having to go to court, and maybe paying lawyers if the ASPCA was broke at the time or found the case too trivial to take. But still what a mess! Coming home to find your place full of smoke and noisy people—some known to you, presumably friends of freinds—and the cats!—hissing and screeching or suspiciously laid back from being injected! Your friends who'd not played the game rushing up to you shamefaced, the players brazening it out with slurred words of self-justification—or whatever their judgment's impairment allowed them to offer as such—hearing yourself shouting "Get out! Get out!" as your anger took over, your slamming the door, after the last of them left. Your running to find the hiding

frightened cat, your stretching yourself on the floor to see under sofas and low-slung chairs and chests of drawers, your coaxing her out with soothing words and food (she might not have been trembling if the tranquilizer held awhile, but she'd still have been hiding). Probably friends who'd not been playing the game would've stayed and helped you clean. It's they that would've explained the silly game. "Dope and drink!" you'd mutter, and flush the toilet once again. The cat by now would be purring or nodding out. Your throat would be sore from yelling and breathing smoke. The place would be freezing, what with all those wide-open windows. You'd slam them shut, still smelling the acrid tobacco fumes. You wouldn't be able to get to sleep till morning. You wouldn't talk to some of those people ever again. You'd wonder why you'd ever stayed in the city. You'd pamper the cat for days with foods you'd never buy for yourself.

PIECES O' SIX — X

He plunked down an asper for a quiet date. The Turkish woman motioned toward a curtain. He hadn't met her in the street. A friend had given him the address in Athens just before he left for the airport. He knew nothing of Ankara. He had taken a cab at the airport, giving the driver the address of the hotel at which a travel agent had reserved him a room, but while moving through a bazaarlike street, had suddenly changed his mind, tapped the driver on the shoulder, and silently handed him the slip on which his friend had scrawled this address. "No to hotel?" asked the driver. "That's right," he agreed, nodding his head where the driver could see him in his rearview mirror. The driver slowed to read the slip again, then hung a sharp right a block or so further on. He muttered the name of the street, glanced up to the mirror to meet the man's eyes, and then gathered speed through the twilit street. When they reached the place, the driver's try at an overcharge was all but pro forma. He accepted philosophically, even with respect, a compromise between the overcharge and the amount his friend had suggested as proper. "OK, boss," he said. "That's the place. Up them steps. Look out for broken glass." As the cab sped off, the traveler stood looking up toward the paint-chipped door

at the top of the steps. Then he started to climb them, avoiding, not the broken glass, which was too ubiquitous to sidestep, but the flattened carcass of an animal, too far gone to be identified as rat or half-grown cat. Peering for a bell—the far-off streetlight did little to help—he fished a pocket flashlight from his jacket and in its light finally descried an ambiguous handle far down on the left-hand lintel post. He gave it an experimental tug and was, he realized, nearly disappointed to be rewarded by a high-pitched tinkle. After an unresponsive minute, he was reaching toward the handle again when the door was opened abruptly. He was relieved to be greeted by a quietly dressed, aquilinely beautiful woman, whose long dark hair fell freely over her silk-covered shoulders. He murmured his apologies for not having phoned from the airport and mentioned his Greek friend's name. She smiled in recognition and invited him in in nearly unaccented English. Welcomely, the entrance hall contrasted with the steps outside. It was clean, well-lighted, and furnished with a nearly fussy elegance attesting to someone's thoughtful choice. He wondered whether it was that of his handsome greeter, who, he'd decided, was probably part Armenian. She paused at the foot of a staircase—he saw another farther back—and turning toward him with a smile, spoke again in a low, pleasant voice: "Please. Up here. It's a bit steep. Better hold the banister." He did as she suggested, reaching, at the top, a hallway almost identical to the one below. She took a small tray from the top of an ornate sideboard. "Please," she asked, "a very small coin. The smaller the better." Wondering, he plunked down an asper for a quiet date. The Turkish woman motioned toward a curtain. Since he'd not met her in the street, but had gotten her address from his friend in Athens, and since he knew nothing of how things were done in Ankara, he followed her cautiously into the adjoining room. She closed a door on the inward side of the curtain. The room was dark. Uneasily, he waited by the door while he heard her moving about in the chamber. Then she struck a match and lit two candles on a table next to a low, sumptuous bed, wide and covered only by an ivory damask sheet. While he'd waited in the dark, she'd replaced her clothes with a gauzy robe, gathered at the waist by a thin gold cord. He stared, embarrassed at a surge of complicated feelings—wonder, lust, fear, puzzlement, and a somewhat surprising tenderness. He pondered what it was about the woman that aroused the last emotion. He'd never seen her before. He was sure of that. And though he'd met some women having vaguely similar features, none of them had he known intimately and none had possessed such startling beauty. She looked at him smiling and asked, "Do you like what you see?" "Oh yes," he quickly replied, "Oh yes. You can be sure of that! I don't think I've ever—" You needn't flatter," she interrupted gently. "I'm *not* flattering! I'm overwhelmed! You're incredibly beautiful! I don't think I've ever—" "Maybe not," she said, "but that's *your* business, not mine. Mine is merely to please you and send you on your way." "Send me on my way," he dully

repeated, and felt a piercing sorrow, sudden and astounding. She moved toward him with a smile. "No need to look so sad," she said. "It happens every day. People meet, and then go on their way." "I know," he replied. "I just wish I'd met you in other circumstances . . . elsewhere . . . " "Where?" she asked. "You *would*n't have. I live in Ankara and you live . . . in Athens? New York?—" "I live in Kansas city—" "I know where *that* is—" "And seldom get away from there. —You know where Kansas City is?" "Sure. I have an uncle in St. Louis. He sometimes has to go to Kansas City. Something about meat . . . " "He's a butcher?" "No, he runs a kind of restaurant." "*What* kind?" "Well, they do other things there, too. I don't think they're all legal. —Nothing political," she nervously added. "I wouldn't care if it was," he smiled. "What's your name?" By this time they were sitting side by side on the bed, and he was considerably calmer. "Anahid," she answered. "It was my grandmother's name—my mother's mother. She was Armenian." "Oh, I *thought* you were." "Only my mother's mother. My father's Turkish and my mother's father was Greek." She raised her left hand to his face and slowly stroked his cheek. "Don't be sad," she whispered, "and don't be afraid or bashful. I'm here to please you." "But—a woman like you!—I mean—so beautiful and kind— And you asked for a very small coin—you accepted—an asper!" "Don't you understand?" she asked. "Some things are done only for form. You're my friend's friend. He's a wonderful person, our friend! And he's helped me in ways I couldn't begin to explain! But I'd have a bad conscience if I didn't ask for *some*thing. It's been my trade since I was fifteen. I don't even *need* the money now. I'm rich!" She noticed his questioning look. "Oh, the neighborhood!" she laughed. "I'm used to it here. I prefer it. I've lived here all my life. I'd feel out of place anywhere else! No one bothers me here. Even the police look after me! I have, as they say, 'friends in high places'—and, thank goodness! even *they* don't bother me. It's a little complicated! Don't worry about it. Make love with me. I like the way you look. I feel I can trust you, and—I know this'll sound silly coming from a woman like me—" "*Don't* say that!—" he cried. "I'm drawn to you, somehow. I don't usually feel this way about a man, even if I like him. And I've been in love—but that's never happened to me suddenly. The few times GAL-it's happened—and they're *very* few!—it's been during a long friendship. One of my 'friends in high places' . . . " "Please," he said, and kissed her. Soon she was helping him undress, giving little licks and kisses and nibbles to each part of him as it became exposed. As she removed his jacket, tie, and shirt, she nibbled his left ear, kissed his right collarbone, and licked each of his nipples till he moaned. Then, kneeling beside the bed, she untied and removed his shoes, took off his socks, and surprised him by slowly and carefully kissing and licking the tops of his feet and his soles and sucking his toes. No one had ever done *this* to him before,

and the intensity of his sensations amazed him. His penis, already erect, began to push painfully against the inside of his briefs. He unbuckled his belt. She quickly unzipped his pants and eased them and his briefs over his hips, legs, and feet. Then, still kneeling, she took his penis in her hands and licked it over and over from tip to scrotum and back till he felt he could no longer keep from coming. Suddenly she stopped, looked up at his face with a friendly, teasing smile, lowered her head again, and swalled his penis. Her lips pressed to his pubic hair, her long tongue licked the upper parts of his testicles. She hummed deep in her throat, then slowly drew her lips and tongue up to the tip and down again, gradually increasing her tempo. He lay back, as her hands now urged him to, and let himself passively feel the incredible pleasure. Sensing precisely when he was starting to come, she grasped and twisted both his nipples as he did. He screamed ecstatically, and momently fainted. When he came to, she was lying on him, kissing his lips and subtly massaging his scalp. When he opened his eyes, she smiled broadly and slowly rotated her hips. He realized he was erect again and deep inside her. "Do you like this?" she asked. "Oh yes, he whispered, and began to move his own hips. He felt her clitoris pressing the front of his penis as they moved. He fingered her anus lightly and squeezed her soft buttocks, massaging them in circles, and pressed her against him as they wildly ground and pumped. Their lips and tongues danced a continual kiss. If they didn't come together, neither knew who did first. They slept in each other's arms till birdcalls woke them. The candles had long guttered out. Gray dawnlight lit the room. First she, then he, padded to the nearby toilet and back. The room had grown cool as they slept. She took a soft quilt from a chest and covered their bodies. They slept awhile, then made love again, side by side like nested spoons. While they fucked, she suddenly drew him from her vulva and into her anus, guiding his hand to touch her clitoris, rotating her hips with joyful cries and moans. After they came that time, he knew that he had to stay with her forever. He made a score of international phone calls. He never *did* return to Kansas City.

Michael Davidson

THE ENDURANCE OF RESOLVE

Had expired
went through the mail a second time
was looking for references to me
felt confident enough about the spaces
and intend to be a different person
not different really
just better

would write back to all of them
would not eat a number of foods
would devote the afternoon
to recovering loose slips of paper

house was clean
could be traversed
without touching a thing
could invent reasons to stay at home

smell of salt
tomorrow would be much the same

had started a journal
first page blank just in case
second page, a list of films
had thought to learn their names
followed by a brisk swim
had bought several new pens
for the purpose
and a music box
with a familiar tune

should phone D.
not necessarily in that order
a packet of seeds awaits them
Dear C. the work is not so much elegant
as practical
hoped by it to change neighbor
into frog
its form
an afterthought

would take the film to be developed
once final frames are filled
with the inside of the lens cover

Dear M.
he was great in and out
of his words
there were never more
than he could afford
to live by
we lived by
what he never spent
what was never left

had asserted oneself in print
to the chagrin of practically no one
had memorized the spelling of success
and promptly forgot it
would eliminate breakfast
would sit in the sun
despite the weather

feel close to the room
as though to inhabit
patches of orange and green
devote time to reflection
a space on the wall
for her picture

having a fresh copy
would attempt to read
I live in your appraises
what I look for
in lifting the receiver
someone's voice on the other end

not much
either other
bought a chair
sat in it
waited for the cat to take over
now the cat has a chair

had learned a new sauce
through the mails, someone handed
her a sign to stop talking
that she incorporated into her talk

was becoming more silent
was a nicer person
though bloated following dinner

once the house is gone
another will take its place
would sacrifice proximity to space
history to system
I don't know your eyes
but your name is familiar.

Lauren Shakely

Five Poems

MAY 3, 1984

For hours, days, or years I have gazed
at the unchanging skyline. Now suddenly
it comes to life, a flat plane pierced
with lit rectangles. A block away
a tiny sailboat perches on a sill,
and a cathedral's spire brightens the mist.

This consciousness, a stroke cutting
the normal pattern of forgetting,
is loneliness itself. A tree's sprung
leaves unwind in silhouette,
and tolling bells slam into a heart
too stunned to move.

FIRST LIGHT

In the bathroom, for a few seconds,
naked before the window,
I accept the idea of death.

It has just rained. I part
the curtains and see the wet grass,
the road, the old tree next to the road,

the barn on the ridge, the pond
in a smoke ring of mist, and the wild geese,
huddled, eyeing me back over the distance.

But when it comes it does not come
like this, but as retreat, in animal stages.
Not even the skin resists peeling from the teeth,

and the last words, hoarded for a lifetime,
are nowhere near the lips.

WITH A VIEW

The landlords decide to flay me and broil the strips
rather than patch the ceiling. They hear me
stumping up the stairs and pause,
three sets of claws arched at table.
This is the second flight. By the fourth I yield
to Raskolnikov's sobbing. To kill is too personal
an act. This requires detachment.
The tricolor spire of the Empire State
blazes like a thing organic, a distant star
whose real estate is perpetuity.

MOTHER'S METHOD

Kneeling she unwraps yellow tissue
from costume jewels, babies' beads
and babies' teeth, and unearths a hoard
of actual metal bandage boxes, actual glass
aspirin bottles, and miniature beds
where dolls comfort other dolls.

We can control the microcosm, but flop as gods.
The antidote to fear is glorification of the atom,
so she honors ancestors with a pinch of lace,
and permits a fly to walk unharmed
from the crease of her extended palm.

FROM THE TRAIN

Dusk in central Pennsylvania.
Slanting light plays on the backs of factories,
which surrender chip by chip their advertisements
for a long-forgotten tonic. Rusting boxcars stand
at a rusting siding, where lush weeds sprout
between the ties.
All America seems
to have gone to seed, the industrial society
a twilight's shimmering in a thousand broken windows.
A far-off boy wobbling on his two-wheeler
already regrets having to grow up to say
"I grew up in Downingtown." Yet even decay
is interpretive, the backdrop of illusion.
Not a soul, not a dog or cow, raises eyes
to trace our passing.

Charles Bernstein

Three Poems

THE HARBOR OF ILLUSION

At midnight's scrawl, the fog has
lost its bone and puffs of
pall are loamed at
tidal edge. No more to count
than density arrows its
petulance at crevice laced
with dock, not hour's
solstice nor brimmed detour—
over the haunch of lock and
tress the vein pours sweetly
and Devil's door knows no
more than pester and undone—
the seering moors where I
refrain of lot and camphor.
Only this, a ripple
against a blind of shore that sands
us smooth and mistless: let
he who has not stunned make
sound, cacophany of
nearing, having fell, of
pouring, having stalled. Though
free to bore and load, let
rail retail conclusion, finicky jejubes
at waste of moor, or lord these
tower, tour the template, thoroughfare
of noon's atoll.

FOAM POST

Lose track of where seven Moabite
Everything the stove as agent you
Devolved and basically are
Spunk in a minute reprobated
Adverse elemental approbation gelatinous
Curio sung to deeds socked with
Ginger and gold sullen and then
Surrendered by cave-lit trestle
Of simpering slug-down egress.
Or parts of guarantee cleaned
Out pockets an unclasped shake
Rant about owing restricted
Tributary and wakes on
These stupid tires implements
Trashed in an overgrown bestiary
In a vest of tiers. Notable
Inclination: "Too much belly an' no'
Eno' brain." Sermons of
Vibration who'll holler before
Discrepancy tuck hug—
Tinsel of titularly vague versions
Verging behind programmable dual
Dipsticks. Everything seen so far
Away and more produce on other
Seismographic orifice bundle branching
Toxemia inadmissible as to stuck-up
Steam stadium circuits bored cauldron.
Neptune's climb from the ducks to the
Decks (oilcloth) solvent to dementia
Spud repertory condominium. Flown
Boast (Kelly-green incapacitator): which
Is very natural ("I do not care for the part about
Pirates"), sometime aquatic ("Solange had to say
It was over a long time before"), unconscionably
Pede-like ("the soldiers marched valiantly
To their reward") and preternaturally triumphant
("Available evidence suggests a lack of
Further routes of inquiry"). Periodicity
Or piquant insolvency (not currency but the
Fear of is the). Rain rain
Raining inside my tailored suit. "Twelve

Yards, only twelve yards over, at the
Intersection of Vein and Vine—another
Lawn being mowed! Another
Gracious day!" Not to have to
Not to say, not to have to have
To, not to have to prey, not to
Have to, not to have to feel
Not to, not to have to have to
Say, Pink lemons on the orange
Lime tree.

SAFE METHODS OF BUSINESS

The Sleepy impertinence of winsome actuarials
Lambs me to accrue mixed beltings—or,
Surreptitiously apodictic, impedes erstwhile.
Pumice, for instance, has bowdlerized the steam
As amulets of oddments cedar coatfins
Or rake about shoals. The pig is stabbed
Through the belly (horse grippings are not essences).
For choice is rivulets. The chase of
Carolinas cries in the gorge—not so
Much ranting as astringent. And therefore
I have mailed the teas and come, an
Old man with a wet mouth, when invited.

"They're starting to start up the cranes." & so
For a long while Sophia bade her time
A sorrowful adieu and sat in un-
resplendent edginess near the wharves' waves.
Where are the blue sputter of
yesteryear? "Sometimes
I think I hear
a mosquito but it turns out to be the
Refrigerator." "It's not so
bad once you get used
to it." Always keeping
the Ball on the proverbial
Eye. Can't
be afraid and can't

not to. The
Fear that made Milwaukee
fake it. "I
told the man I would
jerk sodas
for him at his counter
But
I would never prostitute
myself for that fee." Having
captured the two Frankish princes, Balak
Marched on Aleppo, seized
it from his cousin
Suleiman despite
frenzied resistance by the
populace and
then, like his
uncle Ilghazi four years
earlier, set out
To invade the principality of Antiod. "I
don't think you should give
choice to a nine-
year-old. A thirteen-
year-old maybe." It's
Hard to be fair
and just at
the same
time. For instance,
according to *Boston*
magazine, Oliver Wendell
Holmes once
called the city "the hub
of the solar system."
"Fire!"
"That is enough, I
won't bring you again!"
Why Women Admire Liberace.

The dead, dull hours of summer's interminable days
On which no hope, nor shadow, sets to
Bring surcease of this blanched wildness.

Putting her proverbial Toe in the waters, her
Temptors. Narcotic of little care: wailing against
A wall, braiding a gall. The tree has lost

Its neon and beams in sacerdotal douchings
Of incontinent magisterium. Nor changed
Transformed into a seeing
Barred by trial—but released to it, in
It. Several indissoluble esplanades
Less arbitrary than lived in. The
Flesh, smeared as ersatz materiality, among
Whom we multiply. Long dormant the better
To well over—less metonymic than
Inimitable. Forsake the bow, embrace the
Churl. Which braves
It to either destitution, just off
Right of Constitution Caverns.

CAUTION: MARINERS ARE WARNED TO STAY CLEAR OF THE PROTECTIVE RIPRAP SURROUNDING NAVIGATIONAL LIGHT STRUCTURES.

No rest for the wicked, less for the pure in heart.
Teetering at pause in regulus, masthead of rig &
Splay—ablative command in dative array. Peculiar
Pester pursuant to penury. Nor thought at.

"That's the way he called it, caught it." Bituminous
Wings ablast bullocks—pummel of inter-
Tracing, or drains panes. Here so beset upon,
Becalms.

Everybody wants to be a philosopher—serrated
Or otherwise. As for instance as cream as
Perpetuates in as lacquer or lacrity ransoms
Asymptotic dissuasions as freedom's necessity,
Necessity's freedom. Jump or jumble
(Crumble). The boar symbolizes the Ox while
Near dissects instinct. Rather than post-
Ponement what we have is a premature
Arriving but with unlimited potential for further
Arrivings which, translated to the sexual, gives
Rise to theorems of delay. You can swim
Or you can float—there's no metaphysical
Difference; yet history is *made.*

The tide is red (just another Jewish American
Peasant) and the beanstalk
Broods—a rocker for Syncopation
Day. I mean filtration not sediment

(Sentiment)—bumps you stash with
Angelic piquance. Blotter when
Blobbed (the origin of *écriture* [scribbage]).

The summons charges me with parking at a crosswalk on the northeast corner of 82d street and Broadway on the evening of August 17, 1984. The space in question is east of the crosswalk on 82d street as indicated by the yellow lines painted across the street. This space has been a legal parking space during the over ten years I have lived on the block. Cars are always parked in this space and have continued to (unticketed in several observations I made yesterday and today). Apparently, new crosswalk markings are currently being painted in white on both 82d street and 83d street. At this time, the process is not complete. When these new lines are finished, several spaces may be eliminated. However, as they looked at the time I received the ticket, they did not appear to override the yellow lines according to which I was clearly in my right to park in the space. If there is a change being made in the regulations, it seems unfair to penalize before new lines are clearly imprinted. I am sure a check of traffic department activities will show this work in process rather than complete at the time of the ticketing. I parked without any knowledge that regulations were changing, conforming to practices legal over the past decade. As a resident of the block, I feel there should be adequate notice that parking regulations are being changed—if in fact they are—and that it is unjust to ticket before new indications are fully in place and while the preceding yellow lines are left intact.

"If you've got a wayward 17-year-old, it's
going to be tough getting him or her to give you
a urine specimen," concedes Mr. Reuter, who
has tested his own five children. "But then,
if they won't give it to you, you know
you've got a problem."

"Officials in Washington believe confidence
can't be restored as long as a daredevil
is in the pilot's seat. 'It isn't just a move
to get Charlie out. It's a major motion.' "

LINT

There are trains and there is pain
As when a signet skips, a gurgle sighs
You tender chance, employ a tug
Sooner than equation, furthered by
An ounce of quell: despondent cheer or

Netherworldly plug who sprain
Of factious things, trebled and
Makes halls, most noisy knit that
Jaws it chewed, slump clearance
Toward anon

Lines are like that—you stop, sort
and then you waiver. *You*? I only
mean to hobble along to the meeting
and save some ground until then.
The mind is a dam all right, costs
a lot of God damn taxpayer money to
keep it from leaking. The mine is
damned all right, lost a ton of, &c.

I am charged with parking in a no parking anytime zone restricted for U.S. Mail. I did park on West 35th street just west of Seventh Avenue about 3:45 on Sunday afternoon (9/2/84). The only parking sign visible indicated that parking regulations for this section of the street were not then in effect. There was no yellow line nor any trace of postal activity or a post office building. Subsequent to being ticketed, a search of the area indicated that considerably up the street but obscured from the space I parked in was a sign attached to a building exterior—that is this sign was not adjacent to the curb, where NYC parking notice signs are customarily placed, but lying against the building on the inner side of the sidewalk. Because this sign was not posted at curbside and was out-of-view, it was inadequate to give notice that the curbside sign was to be superceded especially since there was a clearly visible curbside sign in the usual place, which univocally stated that parking restrictions were not in effect on Sundays. I ask that this ticket be dismissed.

A kind of state of
subaltern lunacy
armed or expressed
to about the
sum of say
Loquatious Motors
whence, by device
stronger 'en gourds
pretending to be
pony rides, I'll
alter not depend
the mailtruck

as when
harpsichord jangles
over the eaves
looked out, er, locked out
sin helo
ripp(l)ing off into
buttoned-up
boostercables.

MORAL VIEW

Inconceivable in fact that waves
in such
proportion, that
become a
weathering.
do
but to spume
of
seascape and a freezing spoon
nearly full, but risen
proper place at
quite
and gulls
back, it is the
most, enclosed
glowering like
a fault, the cold
combine
of things,
various
sometimes
does,

And so we returned to our basic question—
How in heaven do you get an outside line?

Errors have a way
of clawing in the blight
like pawns or ponies
to their anointed
spheres, so coiled

in stumping, or
impress of
clamps, these
halls & barriers
who reprove &
grasp, an arc
of meshed perturbs
and head-first, on it
lopes afloat the
spoil, having
carried or careened
to pumps
& clumps.

One wants to be a stranger but retreats
into familiarity, into the face of a
coin, a spearhead nickel. Bounding by
two frames, a concept unhinged in
its quiescent sag or sap, of whom
is better to say "no glup, no
pedimento". Too many crooks spoil
the sidewalker, at least up to and
excluding, four-and-one-eighth,
$22.95. Merely myopic, queerly
entokened, . . . the only true boats the ones
that have never sailed, nor been wet
by these kept oceans.

Barbara Drake

THE BED

I want my bed back.
Just because you slept in it with me
for all those years
doesn't mean it's your bed.
When I found it, it was painted red,
white, and blue. Part of it was missing.
Do you know which part?
Part of it was patented.
Do you know which part?
Which year was it patented?

My bed is beautiful, posts
of tiger maple—you called it
birdseye maple.
It's not
birdseye maple.
Have you looked at it, really?
The tulip-shaped turnings on top
of each post, the delicate curve below that,
like a modernist apple core,
then a ring like the ring of a planet.
I love the turnings of my bed, I've looked
at it so many times, sitting up in bed,
drinking my coffee, reading, working on
manuscripts, listening to the "Radio Reader"
or music—the first time I heard
Pachobel's Canon in D
and it was raining outside,
a thunderstorm knocking
blossoms off the apple trees.

That was before
someone put the music to a popular movie,
and someone else put it to a wine ad.
Turned out it was everyone's favorite
classical piece that year,
but the first time I heard it
I started crying
because the music was like
the sound of time dying.
I want my bed back.

You've only got it because
you said you'd call the police and have them
chase me all the way to Indiana.
You've only got it because
you wouldn't go to work for three days,
camped out on my bed.
But it's my bed.
Do you know which part is patented?
Do you know what year it was made?
I won't tell you, but it was made by hand,
and someone repaired it for me,
replaced the missing part—you don't know
which part, nor do you know
that the man who repaired it
researched it in a certain museum
to make sure the part was the right shape.
And it is,
so much the right shape
you wouldn't know which part it was
he replaced, unless I told you.
I've told you
it was red, white and blue when I found it,
a parody of early American
painted over the real early American.

There are souls in that bed—I've known them
since I got it—I was glad
to let them hover
over the bed they once slept in,
those dead souls, hovering lovingly
over the bed which was their comfort and beauty.
They spread themselves like a canopy.
I used to pull them up like an old eiderdown,
and they are hovering still, over you.

But they will not like it, what you have done,
that you have taken my bed, their bed,
for you do not really see it,
or them,
nor do you know or believe in them
anymore than you know when it was made
or in what state,
nor do you know
the difference between tigers and the eyes of birds
nor between yours and mine.
Nor did you really know or believe in me,
though I wanted you to.
You think
just because you slept in a thing
it's yours.

But it's not.
And I want my bed back.

Vladimir Holan

from A NIGHT WITH HAMLET*

(Tr. from the Czech by Clayton Eshleman and Frantisek Galan)

The wind blustered through the chimney . . . And somewhere in a grove
ruffled the hair on the penis of a fallow deer . . .
And somewhere in history it chased the gluttonous galleons of
Walter Raleigh,
finally to slash them apart,
just as your mother, out of impatience, once tore
her sleeves listening to Wagner's music . . .
But you can't drive out the soul with drink, like a gopher from
its hole,
because even if you think of one so well-stacked
that you say: get into the stockroom!—you are still a creature
fixed in transient shape by the winged hate
between man and woman . . .

Hamlet broke in: "A salamander in fire!"
Then frying the seed of the Logos in the melted
bacon of his tongue, he hissed:
"What the poet has written, the angel or demon will *do* . . .
Thus does the dream take revenge on uninterrupted consciousness!

*The opening section of the poem appeared in Sulfur 12. The remaining two sections will appear in Sulfurs 14 and 15.

I am still looking for that free dining-hall
whose food window is not the wicket in a cell door,
a wicket through which the imprisoned is observed,
that peephole called the Judas . . .
'*Who doesn't work doesn't eat!*' Yes,
but *what* is work? *To be true to one's unselfish lot*—
or to be a salesman of indulgences
or an ardent stoker in a crematorium,
to insert a thermometer into the rectum of war
or to have to sing at a vintage
as proof that you're not eating the grapes,
to inspect horses' teeth or like a hangman
tear out the nostrils of creatures before execution,
to be corroded by vinegar and bile and take revenge on others,
or burn off womens' right breasts
to make them better archers,
to be the seed of fate into the womb of history
or a feeling sentenced to drudgery
under the grey Siberia of old heads—
or even under the threat of losing your throat, to file through
your chains
and rather gouge out your eyes
that they may not see today's horrors,
and yet hear those long dead
but free singers?

The compositional net at best catches an ornament . . .

I'm not indifferent to
a single little step and to the fall
of a child in the nettles . . . Even if his mother tells him:
go and get some rum for the tea,
off he goes, repeating to himself: rum for the tea, rum for the tea,
until he ends up whispering: tum for me . . .
no, no, I'm not indifferent to a child's
single fall . . . And still evil climbs
humanity's spinal cord, blood spittled
like stairs to the dentist's . . . It is ancient that evil
and weary, and at each step it winces but ascends on and on to the
brain of pride,
for after so many attempts
by saints and poets,
after so many attempts by saints and poets to switch off the current—
it believes only in the harmonious moment
when there's a short-circuit

between heaven and hell.
But of course . . . We can also wait for
something to go off and love to fall upon us . . .
Or expect that hope lies in patience
and long-waiting . . . Imagine
life's last stop . . .
An old man stood there, cowering
like a word in the rain . . .
'I'm waiting here,' he says, 'for the gentleman,
he promised me an apartment, he said it's unfurnished,
that's fine with me—'
It rained. And the old man's trust
was so blind, or so magnanimous,
that it *saw* a cosy future,
and only the bystanders understood
someone had fooled him
at the *mezzo-rilievo* of the moon . . . But you know how it is:
suddenly nothing, absolutely nothing,
absolutely nothing left across the way,
nothing like the moment when it seems
the future too is behind us.
Whoever loves should rejoice!
But the universe though perhaps finite
is still limitless . . . A man is suddenly despondent,
a woman cold, so they haven't killed each other
they come together, and are grateful
that once again they see something of fate,
even though it leads shamelessly
to the poorhouse . . . "

And Hamlet continued:
"When an abandoned man consoles himself,
he may in the end wave with a gleaning hand.
But if he sits as a couple he has too many
words and gestures, since before a witness
he emphasizes his pain . . . And only in death
are both his words and his hands forever crossed
and he is silent . . . But is he happy?
Happiness! Have you a note from the doctor? *I don't understand!*

Even if there were no God, even if there were no human soul,
even if there were a soul, but it was mortal,
even if there were no resurrection,
even if there were nothing left, really nothing,
my own as well as your participation in such a comedy

would only be compassion, compassion for living
which is only breath and thirst and hunger
and mating and sickness and pain . . .

Once, walking through a field of blossoming heather,
I overheard a child-like *why?*
and I couldn't answer.
And I still couldn't today after all these years,
at the mid-relief of the moon,
because an answer is not enough for children, nor a question for adults.

When my childhood trustingly accepts me,
I can't help singing.
When I think of Christ's crown of thorns,
I'm struck dumb with horror.
When I look at a thorn bush and see a bird's nest,
I prick up my ears.
But everytime I get to know a man
I can't help weeping . . .

Lament and song, and poem and music . . .
Imagine someone
who has been searching for his friend for a long time
and learns that he is in such and such a hospital . . .
What does he do? He takes a batch of the nicest presents
and hurries to visit him . . .
But when he discovers that it is a mistake
and that his friend is still missing,
he asks the first patient whom he meets in the corridor
if he happens to know someone
whom nobody visits . . .
'Why that's me,' the patient says, 'that's me,
nobody's visited me for a whole fifteen years!'
The visitor makes him a present,
but the two in the hospital corridor are no longer alone,
because at that moment they are enviously and hungrily
surrounded by nearly all the patients
who with an almost vengeful if not truthful obstinacy insist
that nobody has visited them for years either . . .

Half a kingdom and the hand of a princess!
A girl recently wrote me
inquiring whether she should go out into the world

or (like invisible fruit)
wait for the last tree in the world the height of a young man . . .
I wrote back in the snow under her window
to wait until Mozart once again
expressed the throbbing of a heart in love
with double violins in octaves . . .
She wrote back: I'm beyond that and I know very well
that for Janáček timpani were enough
to express a woman's sensuous life . . .
I wrote back that for death
a clarinet melody was enough . . . I know I was being bad
but that girl didn't care
and lives and will live and wait,
wait *curiously,* even though she knows
that the bast *is stripped while in sap* . . .
You'll say to a child: Shut the door!
And he: What's coming?
—Marsyas's skin, darling!

"Women!" said Hamlet, "Eve, Lilith,
Kobolda, Empusa, Lamia!"
Whom did you name? I asked.
He said: "Why, one woman of all the women
of Adam! . . . " And he continued:
"Women! That seemingly fleeing word stopped nakedly,
threw its garments into the hands of our desire
and said: I am not love!
Everything then looks as if it were
bloody cotton, hot lips and milk-stand,
a teasing beginning to a male finish
which begs on knees in the snowy mud of the sheet,
a fifth thumb into two thighs,
a warm pine cone into a cold oven,
a duel of two blind people
slamming into frontal hatred
behind backing up crab forms,
when even a murderer meets his nemesis . . .

There's no knowledge . . . We live in nothing but delusions.
And still we are aquiver with anguish
that not even they will remain
—or that they will remain with us forever
with the smell, when the glow which had a lover in the sun
suddenly seemed to marry a beaver machine . . . or
a treatise on prehistoric dogs . . .

All this between paste-board covers . . . Yes, of course!
And immediately we are different. Ourselves. On our own.
And immediately we are death . . . Death in the jungle . . . He will
grow
a beard and no one will recognize him . . .
And she with the loveliest folds in a perfectly simple garment
will let her nails grow to release more easily
the firmly held green slope of children's laughter . . .
The autopsy will then note with a reservation:
when will you forget, soul, that you haven't yet been noticed?
And when will you remember? . . .
Then those who stay behind will light the lamps for a whole year
while a blizzard, with its right hand
in the chimney sleeve, puts on the whole house . . .
And at the very moment they want to show they're not afraid:
fear has arrived out of the blue, but fear,
fear to say that and fear not to say that,
fear at the Negro music of raindrops
beating into burdock leaves,
fear of the squirrel peeling the cone from a pineapple,
fear of the nurse who doesn't know the phone number of the doctor
in the very next room,
fear of the Three Kingly smelting of lead,
fear of name-days, feminine and masculine,
fear of wealth which desires something more precious,
fear of freedom, and fear of the poet
who guided Eurydice out of the underworld.
For Orpheus, leading her away, *did not look back*
and so brought her back to *this* world.
Once here they took several steps:

. . . . .

John Taggart

FOR JERRY LEE LEWIS

What's here not what you believe
what's here and not what you believe
not fire that never dies never quenches
bones here and not that fire.

What's here not what you believe
bones here and not what you believe
hell fire that never dies never quenches
me and my bones not fire.

Bones here and not what you believe
not the big black book
black book of burning fire that never dies
bones in slow procession.

Bones here and not what you believed
book of burning fire
bones swerving a little in procession
swerving a little for you.

We are what's here for you Jerry Lee
we're what's here for you
bones and a poet torn in two
me and my bones for you.

NOTES
CORRESPONDENCE
REVIEWS

The Poet Assassinated
And Other Stories
Guillaume Apollinaire
translated by Ron Padgett
North Point Press, 1984

Ron Padgett's admirable translation represents the first complete English version of Apollinaire's *Poet Assassine*, a novella and sixteen stories, first collected in 1916. The title novella was originally translated by Matthew Josephson, for Broom in 1923; and then by Padgett in an earlier version (Rupert Hart-Davis, London 1968).

It is unfortunate that the new edition still contains such discrepancies as measurements given in both American and European units (i.e. yards and centimeters), and inaccurate translations (see below). Happily, this new version spares the distracting illustrations by Jim Dine, neither attractive nor particularly germaine to the text, which had accompanied Padgett's first effort.

Considered—perhaps due to its reputation as a "novella-a-clef"—one of Apollinaire's most important prose works, "The Poet Assassinated" is not, to my mind, the most compelling piece in the collection. It often drags, through no fault of Padgett's, in the transitional sections between

chapters, when the hero must get from one location or situation to the next. The most enjoyable sections allow Apollinaire to exercise the full range of his exuberant and hyperbolic wit. For instance, the chapter "Fashion" reads like an outrageous satire of VOGUE, informing us that for "spring wear, there'll be many clothes made of bladders, pleasant shapes, light and distinctive."

This brings me to one of the few glaring mistakes in Padgett's translation. "Meetings," the chapter immediately following "Fashion" describes a fictional encounter with François Coppee, the highly conservative poet of the Academie Française and special bête noire of Apol linaire's. "Meetings" was culled from a pseudonymous article of Apollinaire's in LE PASSANT (magazine published in Brussells during the Teens). Since this section also includes lengthy reference to Coppee's celebrated play, *Le Passant,* it seems a pity to translate "le passant" as "the stroller." As this word usually means "flaneur" in French, one might think Apollinaire was alluding to his work for *Le Flaneur des Deux Rives.* Agreed, "passer-by"—the correct English idiom, is too clunky; but perhaps, to preserve the reference to Coppee's play, the *Stroller* should have remained *Le Passant.*

When I say that Padgett's translation is admirable, I mean that it is faithful without being stiff. Padgett's ear is good; he keeps pace with Apollinaire, shadows him pith for pith, punch for punch. Consequently, since many of the stories in this collection are more appealing, have more charm, more irony than "The Poet Assassinated," Padgett's translations of them are better than his work on the title story.

Apollinaire excels at first person narrative; and these stories range from the poignant ("The Eagle Hunt") to the vicious ("The Departure of the Shadow"). "Our Friend Meritarte," about a chef whose cooking is an art which culminates in a lethal satire, is a masterful example of both the translator's and the writer's skills. One could say about them what Apollinaire said about Meritarte: "It's true that he was by no means a scholar or scientist, but above all a man of imagination, a poet with a special gift for satire." "Giovanni Moroni," however, lacks the central organizing theme which makes these stories so powerful in their humor or pathos. Nor is "Giovanni" made any more readable by Padgett's insensitive rendition of the first sentence. Had he translated "d'ailleurs" as "for that matter," and "cependant" as "nonetheless" instead of "moreover" and "however," Padgett would have come out with a more grammatical introductory sentence.

Finally, since the Pleiades edition of Apollinaire's prose came out in 1977, I must reproach the editorial decision not to annotate this collection. Certainly, errors such as passant/stroller could have been avoided; and the reader would have been well served by seeing documentation for the autobiographical elements of "The Poet Assassinated."

RACHEL STELLA

Baudelaire's Flowers: Beauty, Evil and Kitsch

"Traduttore, traditore"—translating as betrayal of the poet—is a universal maxim; and it is of just about as much practical use as Montaigne's "le style, c'est l'homme même," which invites biographers to read literature as a transparency and, conversely, invites thoroughgoing formalists to conclude that anything not present and retrievable from a writer's style isn't worth knowing. My point, of course, is that translators work in a historical and social context, as did the writers whose work they attempt to bring to a new public. It follows that every translation that has ever been read as literary speaks to us of its readers and their expectations. Any translation that lacks such an intention has probably not had much of an audience.

Charles Baudelaire, whose *Flowers of Evil* met with moral outrage in the press and official condemnation in the courts of prudish Second Empire France in 1857, has since come to represent much of what is modern and esthetically significant (for us) in nineteenth-century French poetry. In fact, the gradual establishment of Baudelaire as a great poet inside and outside France took place relatively late, between the end of the first World War and the beginning of the second. Translators have been at least as important as critics in preparing their audience to read Baudelaire in new ways, in keeping with the changing expectations of the times, in keeping, too, with the translator's own genius which, in ideal cases, has molded those expectations.

It has been Baudelaire's good fortune to attract a series of more or less eminent translators in several languages whose work tells us *how* Baudelaire means to readers of a particular time, place and temperament. The latest of these in English is Richard Howard, who initially stimulated the ruminations that led to this article. His is the first complete translation of *Flowers of Evil* into English in a generation and the first ever undertaken singlehandedly by a respected American poet. My first reading of Richard Howard's Baudelaire late in 1982 was enthusiastic. His poetic voice has an accessible, conversational quality that I liked very much, recognizing in it the confessional tone that Gide had called attention to in Baudelaire. On first reading I was careful to attend to Richard Howard without reference to Baudelaire's originals, which in the Godine edition are printed as a separate unit following the American translation. I had reread *Les Fleurs du Mal* many times in the original since discovering Baudelaire as an undergraduate twenty-five years earlier. I could count on memory, I

thought, to let me know how Richard Howard was doing as my reading progressed.

I didn't make too much of the fact that some poems I had long been fond of in the orginal ("Elévation" or "L'Invitation au voyage," for instance) left me a bit cool in Richard Howard's translation. After all, he had revealed to me beauties in poems like "The Irremediable" that had eluded me in the French. It seemed to me a fair trade-off. The complications began when I decided to do a serious review of Baudelaire's principal English-language translators. It wasn't long before my modest intention—to write a piece for *Sulfur* on Richard Howard's Baudelaire—opened up into a maze of considerations about Modernism, its immediate antecedents, and its aftermath. I was struck by the inadequacy of my earlier notion of reviewing Richard Howard without taking into account the major shift in sensibility that his translation of Baudelaire presupposes. What follows is an attempt to organize a subject that could be treated at much greater length by focussing it on two or three central features of *Les Fleurs du Mal.*

⁂

There have to date been three principal avatars of Baudelaire in English. The first face Baudelaire presented to the English-speaking world was Decadent-Satanic. Introduced as early as 1861, six years before Baudelaire's death from syphilis, in Swinburne's review of the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal,* the poet of Art for Art's Sake was to become, three decades later, the herald of Decadence. Swinburne had called the attention of English readers to that hyper-refined morbidity of the senses which Eliot, in 1930, would try to minimize: "Not the luxuries of pleasure in their simple first form, but the sharp and cruel enjoyments of pain, the acrid relish of suffering felt and inflicted, the sides on which nature looks unnatural, go to make up the stuff and substance of this poetry."[1] Swinburne was of course unusually qualified to appreciate Baudelaire's poetic representation of algolagnia. In this instance he was thinking in particular of the sonnet "Causerie," which Richard Howard has entitled "Conversation (One Side)." Swinburne's emphasis on Satanism in *Les Fleurs du Mal* was to have a more general appeal to Baudelaire's English translators around the turn of the century.

As translated by Arthur Symons and Lord Alfred Douglas, the poet of *Flowers of Evil* stood for Aestheticism and rebellion against late Victorian and Edwardian morality and stodginess. The sestet of the sonnet "Beauty" was rendered by Oscar Wilde's young companion as:

> Singers who see, in trancèd interludes,
> My splendour set with all superb design,
> Consume their days, in toilful ecstasy.
> To these revealed, the starry amplitudes
> Of my great eyes which make all things divine
> Are crystal mirrors of eternity.[2]

"Les poètes" have become "Singers"—much as in Swinburne's "Ave Atque

Vale, in Memory of Charles Baudelaire"—and their "austères études" in the original are surprisingly ecstatic in the English. Baudelaire's poets enter into no "trancèd interludes"—which are presumably required to account for their "toilful ecstasy"—since the image in Baudelaire refers to Beauty in womanly guise, not to the poets themselves. Lord Douglas has managed the trick of rendering Beauty sexless, so that the reader ignorant of the original with its gender markers can readily imagine Baudelaire's "Singers" in ecstatic contemplation of some particularly handsome youth.

The first edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* closed on a distinctly Satanic note. "The Death of the Artists" was translated by Arthur Symons, who strained mightily to match the original rhymes: abba / abba / cddc / ee. It is not surprising that he rendered the Satanic sense of the poem better than any other translator has done. But the stylistic mark of Decadence in this translation is the overdetermination of the theme by the inclusion of several blasphemous elements (Capuchins, Confessional, sins and their absolution) that do not exist in the original of lines 9–12 or elsewhere in the sonnet:

> There are those who have never known their idol,
> And these damned Sculptors, and their Capuchins
> Who at the Confessional absolve our sins,
> Have but one hope, O Paris, for some Bridal![3]

Compare Richard Howard's translation of the same four lines, which he presents, as did Baudelaire, in tercets:

> To some their idol will not be revealed,
> and their doomed sculptors, branded with disgrace,
> upbraid themselves and lacerate their breasts,
>
> nursing one hope, supulchral Capitol!—

The complete absence of any religious reference in Richard Howard's translation, however well attuned it may be to the sensibility of his readers, nonetheless modifies the original. Arthur Symons gratuitously amplified Baudelaire's Satanism. Richard Howard simply edited it out. The "Grande Créature / Dont l'infernal désir nous remplit de sanglots!" was taken by the Decadents as a reference to Old Nick, the Infernal Creature, to whom Baudelaire's artists have presumably sold their souls. Other twentieth-century translators have been embarrassed by it as well.

Satanism is admittedly a small enough theme in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, but as a particular instance of Baudelaire's troubled, sometimes blasphemous Christianity, it points to a major paradigm that shifted noticeably between the first and second wave of Baudelaire's translators and readers. Modernism brought with it, and was certainly brought about in part by, the gradual abandonment of religion as humanity's striving for a transcendent Ideal. The importance of Symbolism, and of Baudelaire as its principal poetic source, was that it presented the symbol as self-sufficient, self-contained and whole, the artistic analog of the immanence of experience.

Critics and translators muted the Romantic elements in Baudelaire's poetry at the same time that their reading placed him at the fountainhead of the Symbolist movement. T. S. Eliot understood what was at stake when he wrote in 1930 that: "It was once the mode to take Baudelaire's Satanism seriously, as it is now the tendency to present Baudelaire as a serious and Catholic Christian. . . . I think that the latter view—that Baudelaire is essentially Christian—is nearer the truth than the former. . . . "[4] C. M. Bowra did not hesitate, a dozen years later, to take the next step. Religion in Baudelaire was to be seen essentially as the analog of artistic experience:

> The essence of Symbolism is its insistence on a world of ideal beauty, and its conviction that this is realised through art. The ecstasies which religion claims for the devout through prayer and contemplation are claimed by the Symbolist for the poet through the exercise of his craft. Nor is so proud a claim entirely unreasonable. For the undivided attention which the enraptured worshipper gives to the object of his prayers and the sense of timeless contentment which he finds through them are not entirely different from the pure aesthetic state which seems to obliterate distinctions of time and place, of self and not-self, of sorrow and joy. Nor is it easy to say whether the rapture which so entrances in the poetry of St. John of the Cross is really religious or aesthetic.[5]

The poetic ecstasies C. M. Bowra had in mind were no longer those which Lord Alfred Douglas had introduced surreptitiously into the sonnet "Beauty." The vocabulary may be the same, but the relation of word to image and of both to the poem as aesthetic object had undergone a sea change. Roy Campbell, who translated St. John of the Cross before undertaking *Les Fleurs du Mal,* can be said to have brought something Spanish to Baudelaire. For him "The Death of Artists" is a statement of religious-aesthetic questing:

> We'll still consume our souls in subtle schemes,
> Demolishing tough harness, long before
> We see the giant Creature of our dreams
> Whom all the world is weeping to adore.[6]

Roy Campbell's virile, soldierly Baudelaire may strike us as the exact opposite of the effete poet of an earlier generation, and perhaps equally mannered in a quite different way. We can nonetheless recognize a consonance of vision with Bowra in the sestet of "Beauty" in the Campbell translation (p. 23):

> Poets before my postures, which I seem
> To learn from masterpieces, love to dream
> And there in austere thought consume their days.
>
> I have, these docile lovers to subject,
> Mirrors that glortify all they reflect—
> These eyes, great eyes, eternal in their blaze!

The poet does not stand apart from his creation "in toilful ecstasy." The

sonnet has itself become the symbol of Beauty, not an allegorical statement about it.

The Modernist Baudelaire in English avoids a sensational treatment of those subjects that were, in Baudelaire's day, most scandalous. The "lesbian" poem subtitled "Delphine et Hippolyte" was condemned as immoral at Baudelaire's trial in 1857 and excluded from the second edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1861. At the same time that Eliot was reinterpreting Baudelaire for a new generation of English speakers, Aldous Huxley published a translation of "Femmes damnées" in his collection *The Cicadas* that conveys a very similar sense of what is important. His decision to keep the rhymed quatrains of the original sometimes led to a forced syntax and an occasional gratuitous image, as in the third quatrain, which describes Hippolyta after her sexual initiation by Delphine:

> Tears and the muffled light of weary eyes,
> The stupor and the dull voluptuous trance,
> Limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flies—
> All served her fragile beauty to enhance.[7]

Here the regular meter and strong rhyme reinforce the pictorial quality and provide the formal tension necessary to balance voluptuousness and fatigue. Huxley excelled at representing the competing claims of the body and the conscience, of sex and guilt (he rhymed "vex" with "sex"), and his translation emphasizes through this formal tension the inexorable evolution of Baudelaire's poem in the direction of a damnation that is presented as inevitable, yet consciously accepted by the damned lovers. Hippolyta's torture, at the beginning of her long speech, is particularly well translated by Huxley into images of rending and tearing (19th quatrain):

> 'One may not serve two masters here below.'
> But the child answered: 'I am torn apart,
> I feel my inmost being rent, as though
> A gulf had yawned—the gulf that is my heart.

There is no doubt in my mind that the formal constraints that Huxley accepted as translator are an integral element in his achievement. To put it another way—more in keeping with the direction and purpose of this article—Huxley's achievement highlights the salient features of the Modernist poetic that he and others of his generation drew, in part, from Baudelaire himself.

If we contrast Richard Howard's translation of *Les Fleurs du Mal* with his predecessors', what we see—apart from the translators' own strengths and weaknesses—are some of the features of an emerging Post-Modern Baudelaire. Richard Howard's more colloquial English will certainly attract readers who would be put off by features of Huxley's lexicon ("flies" in the 3rd quatrain above, for instance) that now seem quaint. The decision to render Baudelaire's vocabulary less distant from the American reader of the 1980s is in keeping with Richard Howard's intention to convey as much as possible of the private register in Baudelaire to

which Gide had already called attention. It is legitimate to ask whether the gains more than outweigh the losses entailed by these decisions. Richard Howard's translation of "Damned Women (Delphine and Hippolyta)" provides some partial answers and the elements of a critical dialog. The third quatrain gives this view of Hippolyta:

> The sluggish tears of her unfocussed gaze,
> her eager arms flung down as in defeat—
> every trace of voluptuous apathy
> served and set off her fragile loveliness.

The first two lines fall quite naturally into iambic pentameter and mark the "poetic" intention of the language. But rather than sustain the mood he has created, Richard Howard prefers—his use of the dash at the end of the second line marks this preference—to return to a decidedly prosy rhythm in the second half of the quatrain. The fourth quatrain, were it not for its lay-out on the page, could be read as a not especially rhythmical prose: "Reclining at her feet, elated yet calm, Delphine stared up at her with shining eyes the way a lioness will watch her prey once her fangs have marked it for her own."[8] Only the prior assumption that "this is a poem" stands between my reading and the embarrassing observation that this is the kind of descriptive prose found in novels sold in supermarkets. This is to say that, in an otherwise praiseworthy effort to engage today's reader, Richard Howard has, on occasion, served up a melodramatic caricature of Romanticism.

Lest I appear to quibble over a minor flaw, I must point out that there are worse problems. The tone of "Damned Women . . . " is so far from Baudelaire's as to be unrecognizable at times. One need not go so far as Eliot did in the direction of a Christian and Catholic Baudelaire to recognize that in a poem like "Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" the very motor that drives it forward toward its terrible end is propelled by the current alternating between insatiable lust and the realization of sin and its consequences. Hippolyta, who in the nineteenth quatrain will declare herself torn apart by these conflicting motivations, tells Delphine (in the 11th) that she does not repent but that she suffers and is terribly disturbed. The lack of repentance does not, in my view, justify changing the register of the language from moral-religious to pop-psych:

> But then Hippolyta looked up: 'Delphine,
> I am grateful to you, I have no regrets,
> yet I am troubled and my nerves are tense,
> as if a dreadful feast had fouled the night . . .

No regrets? Tense nerves? Already the reader senses that after a few more nights with Delphine there won't be any problem and that for the moment, a Valium will take care of Hippolyta's jangled nerves.

The genuine, moving drama of Baudelaire's poem is gradually reduced to apathy, emptiness, and a dread closer to boredom than to angst. Where Hippolyta is supposed to express her immense pain:

> On ne peut ici-bas contenter qu'un seul maître!"

Mais l'enfant, épanchant une immense douleur,
Cria soudain:—"Je sens s'élargir dans mon être
Un abîme béant; cet abîme est mon coeur!

Richard Howard gives us:

You cannot please two masters in this world!"
But then the girl, in a paroxysm of grief,
suddenly cried out: "There is emptiness
inside me—and that emptiness is my heart!

A statement of emptiness (although likened to searing lava in the next line) leaves the reader with no means to grasp the religious import of the line concerning two masters, which Delphine has uttered blasphemously. (Compare the Huxley translation above.)

The last five quatrains of Richard Howard's translation of this poem are as good as the preceding examples are weak. They are in the poet's voice, not, as above, in the voices of Hippolyta and Delphine. The lovers who, earlier on, seemed to suffer primarily from boredom, are very forcefully condemned to eternal suffering in hell:

Downward, wretched victims! ever down
the path you follow: make your way to hell,
into the pit where crime arouses crime,
seething together in the thunder's maw
and scourged by winds that never knew the sky
Down, frantic shades, and fall to your desires
where passion never slakes its raging thirst,
and from your pleasure stems your punishment.

How is the reader to make sense of this horrible, Dantesque hell? Why are these nice gay women damned anyway? Are they the victims of an uncomprehending society? By removing from the poem all of its specifically religious motivation, the translator has left us with an unmotivated, but splendid conclusion. Since there is no moral cause, the moral effects are unjustified and appear gratuitous.

I have intentionally pointed up some of the weaknesses of Richard Howard's translation first. They are, as so often happens, the other side of his strengths. One of his systematic decisions, or so it would seem, was to avoid rhyme wherever possible, whereas Baudelaire always rhymes, a fact he is careful to relate in his preface. The more relaxed line that results goes a long way toward providing the necessary medium for the intimate voice he seeks to create. I say *create* because Richard Howard's version of Baudelaire's private register is not quite identical to the original. Rhyme, and the absence of rhyme, are a part of the problem and of Richard Howard's solution to it. Well into the twentieth century readers in both French and English expected Baudelaire's private register, his special voice, to speak through particular combinations of rhythm and rhyme. That this is no longer the case I take to be a fact. But it is a fact that a good translator like Richard Howard cannot afford to equate with license. There is ample evidence in his *Flowers of Evil* that he has worked

with great care to restore in tone, shading, and in vowel and consonant combinations what he has chosen to sacrifice in avoiding rhyme. In some cases the superiority of his results is easy to demonstrate. The introductory poem addressed "To the Reader" is important because it literally sets the tone of the collection. There is also no better example to make the point concerning the importance of one poet translating the entire collection in the same voice. The original, to my mind, is not one of Baudelaire's better poems. Despite some fine images, the allegorizing of Ennui appears somewhat arch to later readers and distances the whole poem more than one might like. Richard Howard has undertaken to minimize the distance. The initial quatrain immediately speaks to the reader in the same voice that I recognize in the best of Baudelaire's poems:

> Stupidity, delusion, selfishness and lust
> torment our bodies and possess our minds,
> and we sustain our affable remorse
> the way a beggar nourishes his lice.
>
> (P. 5.)

Baudelaire is made present to the reader here in a way that no other English-language translator has managed. The tone of confidentiality that will prevail in Richard Howard's translation is immediately caught by the reader's ear, which is quite prepared in the final quatrain to identify with this disabused, friendly voice:

> Reader, you know this squeamish monster well,
> —hypocrite reader, —my alias, —my twin!
>
> (P. 6.)

Stanley Kunitz, in his *Selected Poems,* gave this version of the same two stanzas:

> Ignorance, error, cupidity, and sin
> Possess our souls and exercise our flesh;
> Habitually we cultivate remorse
> As beggars entertain and nurse their lice.
>
> xxxx
>
> How well you know this fastidious monster, reader,
> —Hypocrite reader, you — my double! my brother![9]

He is much closer to the diction and syntax of the original, and partly for that reason his translation does not read nearly so well as a poem in English.

Robert Lowell, the one American predecessor whom Richard Howard names in his preface, sacrificed both tone and rhythm to the exigencies of rhyme (sometimes approximate) in an "imitation" dedicated to Stanley Kunitz:

> Infatuation, sadism, lust, avarice
> possess our minds and drain the body's force;

we spoonfeed our adorable remorse,
like whores or beggars nourishing their lice.

xxxx

. . . This obscene
beast chain-smokes yawning for the guillotine—
you—hypocrite Reader—my double—my brother.[10]

There are whores aplenty in Baudelaire, but not here. Aside from this gratuitous detail, the American version lacks both elegance and poetic strength (by which I do not mean emotional energy, which abounds in Lowell). Baudelaire was always in control of his medium, an important characteristic that has not in all cases impressed itself upon his translators.

It must be said to Richard Howard's credit that he has consistently made Baudelaire's Alexandrine tetrameter quite at home in iambic pentameter, even if in some instances it lapses into prosy passages. A fine example of his success with this rhythm is the poem "La Servante au grand coeur," which he begins familiarly:

You used to be jealous of our old nurse
who sleeps, warm heart and all, beneath the sod.
(P. 105.)

Compare the rhymed couplet of Robert Lowell's version of the same two lines:

My old nurse and servant, whose great heart
made you jealous, is dead and sleeps apart
from us.
(P. 63.)

Although the cumbersome rhythm of Lowell's line is exemplary of a different problem in translation, I cannot help thinking of Edna St. Vincent Millay's joke about the difficulties of hexametric verse in English:

"Consider now this opening line of a poem of Baudelaire's
which I wished to translate into English hexametric verse:
'La servante au grand coeur dont vous étiez jalouse'
What am I to do with this?
I cannot translate it:
'The big-hearted servant of whom you were jealous'
unless I wish to follow it with some such line as
'Was not such a slut as the other maids tell us'!"[11]

Richard Howard's version is both rhythmical and hamish. The tone is usually right, and that is a high accomplishment. When he is successful (most of the time, fortunately for us all) the result is splendid. When he fails as, in my reading, he did in an extended section of "Damned Women . . . ," the result borders on kitsch. Many more examples could be adduced in favor of Richard Howard's positive qualities as a translator of Baudelaire. Arguments are not lacking either to demonstrate the limiting characteristics of the translator's worldview.

As I indicated at the outset, the principal quesion that Richard Howard's translation raises is one of audience. I have tried to suggest the extent to which significant translations of Baudelaire convey something of the shifts in sensibility that the translator's choices both presuppose and express. Richard Howard's is no exception. If it is possible to speak of kitsch in this regard, that is because formerly crucial religious concerns, once inextricably meshed with esthetics, have been trivialized to the point of banality. Richard Howard's *Flowers of Evil* situates the reader at the opposite extreme from the reading propounded by moralizing critics in 1857. Baudelaire was convinced that the attention of the public prosecutor was called to him by Gustave Bourdin's review in *Le Figaro* on 5 July 1857, in which that defender of morality claimed that, in *Les Fleurs du Mal*"; " . . . the odious mixes with the vile; the repulsive is alloyed with the filthy. . . . This book is an almshouse open to every mental derangement, to every putridness of the heart. . . . " The style is familiar, as is the intention to "protect" the right-thinking public from everything that is profoundly challenging in the arts. No reviewer for a major American newspaper took offence at Richard Howard's *Flowers*. Richard Howard knows his readers; his fine version of Baudelaire's liminary poem is proof enough of that. Our *ennui* is presumed to extend to the very stuff that made Baudelaire electrifying in 1857: sin, perversion, damnation. My reading of "Damned Women" makes the point: if the thematic material is itself so indifferent, then the translator must aim to convey the pleasure of the text as a self-referential play of signifiers. This is poetry for the post-Barthes era (Roland, not Karl). The putrefaction of "Carrion" no longer refers to anything but itself. The corruption of the flesh carries with it no spiritual charge and scarcely any esthetic power; for those readers who can't grasp the intertextuality of the *Carpe diem* in the poem it may do no more than reinforce vestigial images, carefully crafted by our best-paid poets, the ad-men, that the health spa is the place for us.

Once we have successfully emptied the symbol of "Carrion" of both its horror and its hope, we are left, the talent of the translator notwithstanding, with simple garbage: kitsch.

A. JAMES ARNOLD

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10. Robert Lowell, *Imitations*, The Noonday Press (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967 orig. ed. 1958), pp. 46, 47.

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Chronotopes: Notes for a (Temporary) Exhibition on "Affinities of the Tribal and the Postmodern."

In New York City last winter you could visit at least half a dozen major exhibits of "tribal" art: the new Center for African Art, the Maori Show at the Metropolitan, the Northwest Coast show at the IBM gallery, the Asante exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History (where the Hall of Pacific Peoples had also just opened) and the much discussed blockbuster at the Museum of Modern Art, "'Primitivism' in Modern Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern." Last November I was invited to a symposium at MoMA and while I was there, thinking through the "affinity" of tribal and modern (for my conclusions see *Art in America*, April 1985), I came upon Barbara Tedlock's recent description of a Zuni Shalako ceremony, in *Conjunctions* 6. She evoked an unexpected setting (Bakhtin might call it a "chronotope"*), a room and a site of collection radically unlike the exhibition spaces in New York.

*Chronotope: literally "time-space," with no priority to either dimension. See M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), pp. 84-258. The concept can help identify museum exhibits with fictional and actual settings where historically specific relations of power are made visible and where certain stories can "take place" (the bourgeois salon in 19th century social novels, the merchant ship in Conrad's tales of adventure and empire, the surrealist studio of the 20s, filled with African and Oceanian art). Bakhtin (p. 84): "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."

> Imagine a small western New Mexican village, its snow-lit streets lined with white Mercedes, quarter-ton pickups and Dodge vans. Villagers wrapped in black blankets and flowered shawls are standing next to visitors in blue velveteen blouses with rows of dime buttons and voluminous satin skirts. Their men are in black Stetson silver-banded hats, pressed jeans, Tony Lama boots and multicolored Pendleton blankets. Strangers dressed in day-glo orange, pink and green ski jackets, stocking caps, hiking boots and mittens. All crowded together they are looking into newly constructed houses illuminated by bare light bulbs dangling from raw rafters edged with Woolworth's red fabric and flowered blue print calico. Cinderblock and plasterboard white walls are layered with striped serapes, Chimayó blankets, Navajo rugs, flowered fringed embroidered shawls, black silk from Mexico and purple, red and blue rayon from Czechoslovakia. Rows of Hopi cotton dance kilts and rain sashes; Isleta woven red and green belts; Navajo and Zuni silver concha belts and black mantas covered with silver brooches set with carved lapidary, rainbow mosaic, channel inlay, turquoise needlepoint, pink agate, alabaster, black cannel coal and bakelite from old '78s, coral, abalone shell, mother-of-pearl and horned oyster hang from poles suspended from the ceiling. Mule and white-tailed deer trophy-heads wearing squash-blossom, coral and chunk-turquoise necklaces are hammered up around the room over rearing buckskins above Arabian tapestries of Martin Luther King and the Kennedy brothers, The Last Supper, a herd of sheep with a haloed herder, horses, peacocks.

I couldn't stop thinking about this exact, almost hallucinatory description throughout the symposium at MoMA. (We talked of formal and conceptual affinities, of the sense of "magic" felt by Picasso confronting African sculptures, of the relative merits of anthropological and aesthetic settings for non-Western objects.) Tedlock's image of tribal art and *life* was not to be found in the reverent, predictably beautiful displays I was seeing around New York—where all the objects were suitable for an art collector's living room. I kept wondering why something like a Shalako room could have no place in the MoMA show, even in its "Contemporary Explorations" section. The heterogeneous Zuni collection suggested another exhibit—juxtaposing not tribal and modern, but tribal and postmodern. In this exhibit, "tribal" existence could be seen as historical encounter and appropriation. "Postmodernism" could be reconceived outside the dominant centers of artistic and cultural production.

The ultimate rationale for the show would be no more defensible than that for the proceedings at MoMA. It would be as much a projection, and would have little to say about what is actually happening at Zuni—for example, the subtleties of current struggles between traditionalists and moderns. But in the heterogeneous space the exhibit would momentarily open, and in the location of "tribal" creations in a complex, oppositional *present*, unexpected histories might emerge.

*

The Shalako room reminded me of another I had read about. I couldn't recall what it was—perhaps a "Cabinet of Curiosities" from Early Modern Europe, or a description of the old Trocadero Museum in Paris, filled with bric-a-brac, where Picasso first studied African "fetishes" . . . .

It was a scene from Edmund Wilson's *Apologies to the Iroquois*. In the late 1950s Wilson discovers the existence of living Indians in upstate New York, his childhood backyard. He tells of visiting a Seneca ceremony, a "dark dance," composed of traditional song sequences performed in an unlit kitchen. It is a strangely powerful acoustic experience. And Wilson is surprised to find that while the ceremony is performed, in an adjoining room behind double doors, a group of old and young Seneca, including the "master of ceremonies" and the old woman providing the feast, are watching TV. He is bothered by the distracting noise of a comedian's jokes. Wilson eventually succeeds in blocking out the scraps of light and sound coming from the next room. He is swept up in the dark "oratorio."

But conceiving the tribal, or any site of authentic cultural life, must we block out such "noise"? When the long series of songs end, the double doors are left open; the hosts join in the socializing; the TV remains on—with the sound off.

*

I recalled another crowded room where, seven years ago in Boston Federal Court, I had listened to the Mashpee tribe try to prove its legal existence. The Native American inhabitants of a long-standing "Indian town" on Cape Cod had incorporated as a tribe in order to sue for the return of collective lands lost in the mid-nineteenth century. In the courtroom, as court stenographers recorded every word of many incongruent testimonies about their culture and history, people who did not look or sound very much like "Indians" tried to convince a Boston jury pool of their identity.

They failed. People in Mashpee had done too many un-Indian things: they had converted to Christianity; the tribal chief currently taught Phys. Ed. at Falmouth High School. The Medicine Man, for a time, had been a private detective in Hawaii.

The court required that the plaintiffs prove a continuous tribal existence, from the eighteenth century to the present. They could not. In the eyes of the law a reinvented tribe was not a real one. The historical evidence—laboriously compiled by their opponents—showed uneven, sporadic evidence of a "tribe" in Mashpee. According to the record, this elusive form seemed to have come and gone. Indeed the Mashpee had not even "originally" been a tribe (the town was created by the missionary Bourne, to shelter remnants of various Cape Cod groups, decimated by a Plague that had swept the area just before the arrival of the Pilgrims at Plymouth. Worse, the Mashpee had since "disappeared" repeatedly: in King Philip's War, by intermarriage (with Hessian Soldiers, with blacks, etc.), through religious conversion, through steady assimilation, through the (contested) act by which they were made U.S. citizens in the 1850s. The historical record was relentless.

Who or what was it that kept on disappearing?

In the crowded courtroom, beside tables heaped with exhibits, an elderly woman, pillar of the local Baptist Church, spoke softly (with a New England accent) of her childhood surrounded by Indian stories and

Christian beliefs. She said she had no difficulty with the obvious fact that "God" was the "Great Spirit." She testified that in the 1940s she had been secretary for the "American Indian Thunderbird Dancers" (most of whose dances did not originate around Cape Cod).

A bush haired teenager in jeans took the stand. His nickname, "Chiefy."

Judge: "Is this an Indian headband?" —"It's a headband."
"It's a bandana?" —"Right."
"How long have you worn it?" —"As long as I've needed it."

In the exhibition I found myself dreaming of, there was a room where every visitor would be cross-examined on his or her cultural identity. ("Why are you wearing these clothes?" "How can you be an American and Prefer French cooking?") On the walls: photographs by Edward Curtis of the "vanishing race" would be alternated with self-portraits by Cindy Sherman (Sherman as suburbanite, Sherman as movie star, Sherman as career girl, Sherman as scuba diver . . .).

*

Masks and copies. Niapaul's *Mimic Men,* a picture of post-colonial inauthenticity, is recast as a general condition. (See Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28.) Barbara Kruger: "We are very good mimics. We replicate certain words and pictures and watch them stray from or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction." (She appears to refer to women.)

Authenticity (as coherent, original voice, language, essence) comes into question. Identity is understood to be a legal matter, the effect of a subjection. To "pass," the subject adopts incongruent masks.

"Tribal" identity, (re)constituted in the art museums and law courts, is one of these masks. A serious fiction. It is a matter of survival and of power for certain people (in Zuni, in Mashpee, in New Caledonia). GAL-And it may also be a prison, a stereotype (the true, forever-disappearing Indian). The "tribal" and the "modern" on exhibit in New York are contested, historically produced categories. This is what the various "post-" perspectives now in the air help make clear . . . always temporarily. Compounds like "postmodernism" have a short half-life.)

"Affinity of the tribal and the postmodern"—the temporary exhibit at least leads out of museums, out of the art world, and into local settings of cultural, artistic invention—impure, hybrid situations where all people like the "vanishing" subjects of Edward Curtis' photographs, wear costumes and wigs.

*

Sample Captions

What will it really take to move the "tribal" out of the exotic *past* and into the present-becoming-*future*?

—Must the false stereotype be replaced by the true one?

—In what room is the exhibit taking place?

—What multinational corporation is funding it?

JAMES CLIFFORD

White Marriage & Recovery
Amy Gerstler
Illuminati, 1984

"White Marriage," Amy Gerstler's haunting three-part prose poem, begins with its speaker's childhood memories of being "constantly wet" while her lighthouse-keeper father "laced his oatmeal with cognac and filled her days with "groggy demands." The setting changes along with the age of the protagonist, but the speaker's ubiquitous fog and uncomfortable self-awareness does not. The result is an enthralling autobiographical journey which admits to going nowhere. The child of Scene 1, who saw but did not quite understand two lovers "feeding" on a beach, returns home to stare at her father's bald spot, to wonder at the touch of his hand on her hair, and finally—in an abrupt switch from past to present tense—to cringe under the power of his control. "Not even sleep shields me from the power of his frown." Scene 2's mystical lover "under stands" the animals' language but intensifies her own psychic isolation. "Locked" in a "brothel," she finds herself tethered to an arrangement which "protects [her] from worse enslavements." Little is different in Scene 3, where the routine migrations of a family of white herons highlight the sterility of a married couple who have come to "Bless the oak board that divides our bed." The "pale as an iceberg" little girl is now enclosed in a "White Marriage," part of a couple who "always undress in the dark" and whose life has become "a procession of whimpering, living misgivings."

What is not whimpering is Gerstler's language. Her utterly simple sentences develop a voice, neither bitter nor plaintive, but emotionally flat, stunned by the memories it is recalling. A pleasant daydream thus

gives way to bleak reality.

> *Why so quiet, dear?* Just thinking. Remember shortly after we met, when you put your foot down and decreed: NO MORE KISSING? I lifted my skirt, so you'd see what you were talking about going without. But you were right.

The impassivity of such bland acknowledgments annuls both painful memories and the "White Marriage" of quiescence.

"Recovery" takes a more active role toward its stated goal by means of several healing processes. Dreams exorcize both fears and disease; prophets turn their wisdom toward cures. "Science" and "experimenters" give way to " 'the gift';" magical breath works miracles; and dreams come true. The disembodied voices of "Recovery" share a trust in mystical powers and become "impartial witnesses" to the language of belief, "the only one common to all races, all times." While "Recovery" ends with a perversion of this language in the complaints of a man who wanted more spectacular miracles at Lourdes, the healing process is underway. The speaker has abandoned her search for dim memory and conquered pain with medicine of "an invisible kind that can be had everywhere, for nothing." Together "White Marriage" and "Recovery" chronicle an individual's realization of and emergence from suffering and provide a refreshing alternative to purely confessional self-absorption.

TAFFY MARTIN

Response To Mary Kinzie*

It is hard to believe that Ms. Kinzie is not aware that contemporary poetry includes a number of North American, Latin American, and European poets who have, over the past fifty years, continuing into the present, realized in their writing values which she herself espouses yet claims are absent: complex ideas, the real content of inner life, coherence, and freshness of perception. The most disturbing aspect of her essay is therefore

*A response to Kinzie's "The Rhapsodic Fallacy," published in the Fall 1984 issue of *Salmagundi*. This response was made too late to be included in the Spring 1985 *Salmagundi* with other responses to Kinzie. Readers unfamiliar with Kinzie's response to contemporary poetry can look up her "poetry chronicles" (in which 5 to 10 books are reviewed at the same time) in the *American Poetry Review*. It seems clear enough, from the number of books that she has written about over the past few years, that she is an omnivorous reader, and aware of the work of the poets excluded from consideration in "The Rhapsodic Fallacy" who, were they to be included, would ruin her argument.

a willful exclusion and a presentation of insignificant contemporary poems as representative of the state of the art. She seems to believe that itis more important to shake her finger at Linda Gregerson and Catherine Rutan than to engage, for example, Robert Duncan and Jerome Rothenberg. In this way she sentences herself to a present about one millimeter thick, detached not only from the writing of poets now in their sixties and seventies, but from the great and nearby dead, whose work done in the 30s and 40s, is part of a living heritage.

She writes: "Not only have we eliminated from the available repertory of literary responses those forms associated with the eighteenth century, formal satire, familiar epistle, georgic, and pastoral, but also those associated with the Middle Ages and Renaissance, allegory, philosophical poem, epic, and verse drama and tragedy, until nothing is left for us now but a kind of low lyrical shrub whose roots are quick-forming, but shallow."

If she is lamenting that there are no entertaining stock imitations of these forms, so what? What counts is that in variational and improvisational ways, Kenneth Rexroth, Basil Bunting, and Robert Kelly have worked the georgic and the pastoral; Antonin Artaud has set satire, erudition, and poetry, into the familiar epistle; Aimé Césaire has written verse drama; a range of poets including Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Duncan, and Gary Snyder, have written long, philosophical poems. As for the epic: what it might meaningfully be has constantly been under scrutiny throughout the century in a number of diverse and original "long poem" forays (Louis Zukofsky's *A* has so many facets that it probably recognizes most of the forms Kinzie mentions).

Kinzie also excludes new forms that have occurred in the breaking up of old forms, especially this century, e.g., the middle-length poem (not a lyric but not an epic, Césaire's *Notebook of A Return to the Native Land* and Vladimir Holan's *A Night With Hamlet* being superb examples, not to mention Rexroth's work in this potential form), and the various revisionings of what a short or a long poem can be (e.g., Cid Corman's very short poems evolving out of his work on Bashō, or Theodore Enslin's extremely long poems that read like marginalia to an otherwise unstated life). Charles Olson was the first, to my knowledge, to reinspect the word "rhapsody," and notice that in Greek it meant *rhapsōidia,* "songs stitched together," the technique of epic poetry. It happens that since Whitman's 1855 version of "Song of Myself," that the most unique and explored 20th century form, the serial poem, is the child of Rhapsodia. The Rhapsodic is far from being a "Fallacy" in 20th century world poetry; relative to its roots and older meanings, it is our presiding archetypal pattern!

Kinzie ignores all the poets I have mentioned because her own obsession with the past is anchored in hierarchy (high style versus low style), propriety, literary decorum and order, and pedagogically a priori assumptions about "the truth." Is it possible that she does not realize that we cannot anymore have complex ideas *and* hierarchy, or a coherent inner life *and* literary decorum? She is primarily a rather prissy upholder

of out-moded style and taste. Her criticism of an insignificant Ashbery poem is very offensive, for *she* is offended by what she calls Ashbery's "obsessive promiscuity of styles," and after stating that his writing is not only "radioactive," but "dangerously sterile," she concludes that Ashbery is "the passive bard of a period in which the insipid has turned into the heavily toxic." Lurking in such gibberish must be anti-homosexuality, and the fear the self-righteous have at the sight of the high mixing with the low, in short, the intermingling of stratifications and alienations that have to a great extent led the world to its present peril.

It *is* a moral issue, as Kinzie implies, but it is not the one she thinks it is. No alternative model to "The Rhapsodic Fallacy" is needed, simply because the rhapsodic, as technique and sublimation, is not a fallacy. The moral issue might be put this way: when will critics like Kinzie, Harold Bloom and Helen Vendler start writing on poetry that knows more than they do? For over fifty years a new perspective has been assembling. Unfortunately, especially for the young, the poetry of César Vallejo, Aimé Césaire, Charles Olson, Antonin Artaud, Octavio Paz, Robert Duncan, Paul Celan, and Vladimir Holan has not been, as it were, cross-indexed, so as to draw forth the superimposed configuration that it represents. The difficulty in doing so is not, as Kinzie says, because the steppe is arid and covered with monotonous vegetation, but because 20th century world poetry is a rain forest as well as a new wilderness. It takes root, as Césaire has written, in the red flesh of the soil (soil that is at once iron-rich, blood-soaked, and haunted by the corpses of "redskins")—but it also takes root in the eyes of Lorca confronting Borges in NYC in the late 20s with the startling information that the most important figure in North American culture was Mickey Mouse.

I am speaking of a poetry that attempts to be responsible for all an individual writer knows about himself and about his world. It is that simple and that awesome. It is a poetry of wrath rather than instruction, ambivalent about all the major movements of and right before its own time (e.g., in their assimilation of Surrealism, both Artaud and Césaire wrote more fulgurating and enduring poems than any of the Surreal founders), and it reveals depths and abysses of human nature that only the isolated Blake and elderly Goya, to name two great 18th century "outsiders," depicted. It is Expressionistic *and* Objective as well (think of Olson's attention to the topology of Gloucester, or Césaire's observed Martinican flora). Since this poetry has a critical as well as inspirational relationship to Romanticism, and since much of it carries the shattered lantern glass of previous hermetics in the belly of its lines and is much more concerned with process than with product (= masterpiece), it might be identified as Abstract Romanticism. The most trenchant statement on the burden of such poetry was made by Robert Duncan in the opening paragraphs of his essay "Rites of Participation" (Caterpillar 1, 1967).

One reason that the North American poets I mention above are not considered by Kinzie is that the extent of world involvement is so massive and unrelenting in their major work that it cannot be dealt with by standard literary criticism. In the work of Olson and Duncan, as well

as several poets of my own generation, "the war within my members," initially sounded by Blake, is out there, at home, in the bloodstream and arguably in the framework of the universe itself. Everyone is implicated—including the critic! What we need is a new kind of critic-reader who is not only willing to take on material that makes her stretch to her last zoa, but also to accept archetypal psychology, insanity, archeology, slavery, anti-semitism and Capitalism as standard and active equipment of literary response.

For Mary Kinzie, a fabulous beast, a kind of Cerberus whose heads are Poe, Baudelaire and Wordsworth, has darkened the aim of poetry into "apotheosis, and ecstatic and unmediated self-consumption in the moment of perception and feeling." To put it rather dully, poets have been concerned with what Kinzie seems to indict since Sappho. *The Divine Comedy,* Blake's long prophetic books, and some of the most memorable dramatic moments in Shakespeare, define this genre (if it is one). On the other hand, nothing that Kinzie quotes has anything remotely to do with it. Insinuated anxiety, self-indulgence, and violations of surface, the crimes of the unsteady poems trotted out to be heckled, are not apotheosis. Nor do they appear to be damaged by *The Prelude, Les Fleurs du Mal,* or *Eureka!*

Apotheosis, or the deifying/crowning of a god, involves the poet in the strategies of inspiration. Is the source "out there," in aura, in nerves, or in a dark transgression in the past—or is the combined figure of the muse, angel, and duende made up of all these sources? Apotheosis is the power most sacred to world poetry, from shamanistic incantation and reception, to Frank O'Hara overwhelmed with the beauty of BillieHoliday's voice in The Five Spot. Genuine apotheosis is rare and extraordinary (Montale's "The Orchard" is a fine example), and what we really need is more discussion of it rather than sneering at it.

"Ecstatic and unmediated self-consumption" is a peculiar and intriguing charge. Artaud in an essay, "Revolt Against Poetry," distinguished between eating his poem and giving his heart to his poem. While in that essay, he clearly favored the latter act, his greatest poetry feeds off its own tissue rather than performing sacramental devotions. Poetic autophagy might mean that the body of imagination finds itself good, that all imaginative things are good to consume and transform (Ginsberg's last line of *Howl*: "the absolute heart of the poem . . . good to eat a thousand years"). We all know how limiting and instructive repression and taboo are in the creative process. Apotheosis, in an autophagic sense, might be a state of writerly awareness in which there is nothing to repress, in which all materials are given equal potential poemic status.

Such a state of awareness (as practice in contrast to effect) would in varying degrees be contingent upon the writer's feeling for and understanding of his own physical body, especially in our limboless Protestant society, his physical lower body, still the most inaccessible stronghold of material that has been stigmatized as unacceptable to literature. Kinzie pretty clearly indicates the extent to which her ideas about poetry could not accommodate degradation, even the kind that digs a bodily grave for

a new birth. Kinzie is set against the "coarse," the "promiscuous," and "the double treatment of words as both ordinary *and* mysterious, clear *and* turbid." It follows that she would find it double-talk to read "ecstatic self-consumption" as self-realization, the imaginative consuming of the generated material upon which the poem has been building. When that which was previously unknown (before the creative process began) is discovered within the labyrinth itself, the Minotaur or spectre can be embraced instead of murdered.

Poetry, as a psychological art, is still in its infancy, and young writers who seek to create great poems in the year 2000 would be better off with texts by Bahktin, Ferenczi, and Hillman, camped along the Amazon, as their workshop, rather than sitting around Argus-eyed, sharpening their defenses in creative writing wards. I, for one, though, fear that the next couple of decades are going to be more populated by schoolmarmish Mary Kinzies than by Blaise Cendrars riding the Transsiberian Express. The academic level of Apollonian anxiety appears to feel more and more threatened by the Dionysian rifts and pits that continue to appear in the surface of the century. This means that all of us who believe in a tough, impassioned, critical *and* inspired, world-aware poetry that is not meaninglessly avant-garde or conventionally traditional will have to continually speak out for, and seriously defend, a middle ground.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

How the Grinch Imitated Gary Snyder

Gary Snyder once wrote, "In the new way of things, the community is essential to the creative act; the solitary poet figure and the 'name' author will become less and less relevant. Hence I prefer to be with my friends—which is the creative context." There are those who write about Snyder's poetry and still do not understand that this man means what he says. "Community" is not a literary conceit in the way the seven ambiguities are, woven craftily into the poem by some literary magus. Nor can one fathom it by examining the work of a single writer, or the poet divorced from his audience.

A large number of poets, particularly those you discover once you turn the nose of your car north from San Francisco, live away from urban centers. They frequently display a spectrum of assumptions and concerns similar to Snyder's, and share a common store of prosodic techniques.

One method of disposing of these people, by those who write on Snyder's work, is to notice—more frequently deride—Snyder's "imitators"; to issue warnings against the hazards of acolytism; and to invoke some insurmountable gap that divides Snyder from his so-called followers. A review of Snyder's recent poetry by Robert Peters (in *Sulfur* 10) says this: "The difference between Snyder and the followers is that when Snyder takes a sauna it's an experience; when the acolytes do it's merely a bath." One can imagine that Mr. Snyder and his wife proceed in such exemplary manner to heap experience on experience whereas the followers and their spouses merely have children, or dinner, or jobs. I hope I don't need to expand on the neuraesthenic implications of Mr. Peters' statement. But the presence of lesser-known poets in Gary Snyder's vicinity evidently distempers certain otherwise healthy mentalities.

Gary Snyder has spent his adult life forging a sense of what a community might be. He has discussed many of them, including wilderness trail-builders, San Francisco-based poets, a Yoga ashram, and Zen training centers in Japan and America. He presently lives in a definable community in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the location of which he gives as the watershed lying between the south and middle forks of the Yuba River. By his testimony, each of these communities finds cohesiveness in a continuous interchange of learnt and learnable human resources. Snyder's essays and interviews make this clear. The exchange of practical and personal skills, always in evidence in the earlier poetry, has become the explicit torque which shapes *Axe Handles.* The poetic output of a decade, the book creates for its reader an ambience of Snyder's family and neighbors, and the skills they share and exchange.

Among Snyder's neighbors, a number count themselves poets and scholars. Steve Sanfield, Dale Pendell, Susan and Phillip Suntree, Will Staple—these come immediately to mind. The list is much longer. But flipping through back issues of Coyotes Journal, Caterpillar, Origin, Kuksu, discloses an admixture of poets, active for decades, that one could reasonably offer as Snyder-imitators. Curiously, some have been writing and publishing for as long as he has. In fact, Gary Snyder has never been quite the solitary voice crying in the wilderness both his admirers and detractors might prefer him to be. It lubricates the wheels of criticism if he is, but there's something a little sinister in that. By separating Snyder from a community that shares his concerns—whether his immediate neighbors or his wider readership—critics can feast themselves on bits of prosody or biography, while obscuring the crucial beliefs that underpin his practice.

Mr. Peters in the review already mentioned is a ready example. So taken is he by Snyder's successful deployments of language, he apparently doesn't notice that *Axe Handles* is more than a bunch of good or bad poems. The book exhibits a central, organizing concern—a concern the title poem ingenously puts as "craft of culture,/How we go on." The issue explicitly forefronted is that what is learnable Snyder has received from someone else. What is teachable he'll do his best to pass on.

No *homo sapiens* in the last 40,000 years has sprung full-blown

from the void. Mid-1980's Americans come feverishly close though—isolated, disaffected people living a nightmarish swap-meet of lovers, homesites and children. Few of us care about poetry, which in most cultures we know of has been the pre-eminent device for transmitting culturally significant information. Against this condition, Lew Welch turns up in one poem to admonish:

> "teach the children about the cycles.
> The life cycles. All the other cycles.
> That's what it's all about, and it's all forgot."

Evidently a lot of children are still interested.

No one can contest Gary Snyder's popularity. *Axe Handles* sold 30,000 copies in six months, a stunning feat for a single title of poetry. Adequate figures do not exist, but in his 1979 essay "The Political Economy of Poetry" Ron Silliman calculated the annual number of poetry books sold in this country at 170,000. Why Snyder should command such a share of the market will never become clear so long as people like Peters glibly assert that the followers "(adore) him with the fervor they bestow on rock stars." This sort of statement—aside from its sociological inaccuracy—explains nothing. It suggests that Snyder's poetry, when interesting, succeeds in spite of his audience. Which directly contradicts Snyder's own assumption of community as creative nexus. By directly addressing his readers as a unified community—"the great paleolithic sub-culture" he has referred to—Snyder has defined and acquired it.

The direction Snyder's poetry has taken can't be divorced from the acquisition and composition of this audience. This sounds heretical given the current elevation of "textuality" into an intellectual's religion of sorts, but there are precedents. Understanding the verse of Homer, the Beowulf poet, a whole spectrum of poetry once considered our earliest "texts," was totally skewed until Milman Perry and Albert Lord divulged the compositional context of oral-formulaic poetry. It is now clear that scholars couldn't even pose the correct *textual* questions until the *context* had emerged. Snyder is not an oral poet in any Homeric sense, but his poetry takes full account of what he recognizes and deliberately cultivates as an audience.

It is curiously, an audience comprised of people whose interests are not primarily literary. This divides him from almost all other American poets. Snyder's audience turns to his poetry—whether on the page or in performance—for public verification of values many are struggling to achieve in solitude or in small groups. I know marine biologists, non-union bakers, Buddhist scholars, geologists, and a string of inveterately and happily unemployed people who read Snyder's poetry and almost none other—intelligent people who pursue extra-literary interests and professions. They are not groupies. Snyder has not created them. He has attracted their attention by publicly dilating on issues most poets consider incidental to poetry.

As his audience has widened, and his poetry has fused with his adopted public role, Snyder becomes an increasingly gnomic poet. Yet his readers clearly share his scepticism towards unexamined authority. This is not only yankee hard-headedness, but a cornerstone of Buddhist practice: one remains unconvinced by what one cannot test out for oneself. It also means that in literary spheres Snyder doesn't simply employ his *materia poetica*, but actively encourages its re-use by others. Conspicuous re-circulation of literary technique and poetic "posturings" (a word I'm using simply in reference to how the poet inhabits his or her poem) is what apparently extracts whoops of "Foul!!" from outsiders and speeds their nasty little barbs towards Nevada City. A habit not only petty and unbecoming to literary sharpshooters, but with somewhat fascist implications. Dictating who may permissibly compose poetry without having abuse heaped upon them amounts to human disfigurement. A sane civilization doesn't lack exemplary poets—but it doesn't possess *only* exemplary poets. A nation of great poets is an absurdity; but equally absurd is a literary community comprised of superstars that discourse among themselves, and a populace consigned to silence.

The sales of Snyder's new book suggests a broad audience for poetry is still possible. But an audience not specializing in literature, with many members who lack the training to unlock hermetic verse. I suspect this accounts for the increasing transparency in Snyder's new poetry. Whether it will permit him to claim significant new poetic terrain remains to be seen. *Axe Handles* lacks the linguistic bite and bristling vigilance of his more youthful books. Snyder has virtually suspended the ideogrammatic construction he learnt from Pound, and abandoned the elliptical references that once sent students scuttling for reference books.

As he defers to an audience more interested in botany and politics than literature, Snyder has introduced numerous explanatory digressions—a practice poetically suspect to those who have cut their teeth on Modernist texts, but indisputably useful for the retention and transmission of certain sorts of information. It is actually an ancient practice. In India men and women "of letters" used to commit to verse everything considered worth knowing and passing on. Grammar, mathematics, erotics—all metrically arranged, and composed with intelligence and humor. Chopping wood or programming a computer could fit in well. Though in practice the distinction sometimes got smudged, India's literati drew a precise line between mnemonic "verse" and high-art poetry. The upshot of such incessant versifying was for centuries a remarkably unified intelligence on a culturally variegated continent. Those who feel uneasy confronting Snyder's current poetry, with its refusal to immerse itself in contemporary issues of the *ars poetica*, might find it more useful to define its purpose than to ferret out particular verses for analysis.

Snyder's writings anyhow have become a touchstone of sorts for a large, occupationally heterogeneous crowd. Poetry or verse, populist and democratic, is a clear necessity for them. Once this kind of poetry gets accepted as a fundamental requirement—or better, as a human function that issues into the best definitions of what being human is, like singing, like joking or philosophizing—it gets quickly deprofessionalized. Those

who want to make it their central resolve will. Others engage themselves according to personal compunctions. It is as absurd to malign them for writing poetry as to scoff at Snyder for "imitating" his friends when he repairs his own pick-up truck.

ANDREW SCHELLING

The following three letters, or excerpts from letters, were received in response to Eliot Weinberger's *Pound After Torrey And Other Futures* in Sulfur No. 11.

That Eliot Weinberger disapproved our AIDS Awards is predictable enough, though using that as an occasion to strut his dyslexia so self-righteously seems to carry malapert chutzpa to a peculiar extreme. And, to judge from his piece in the current issue, that odd quality seems to be a staple of his style. Actually I rather like the patina of competence it lends, but isn't it at least mildly ironic that it is precisely that quality in E.P.'s prose locutions compounding the noxiousness of his anti-semitism? I mean an aggressive bzazz masking dubious content, dubious because it is borne exclusively on self-righteousness. It is lately most visible in neoconservatives, such as Podhoretz and Kramer—the junior varsity versions of Buckley. But even they are not so trigger happy about censorship as Weinberger is. In the case of RS, not content to have articulated his own critique, he demands that the federal and state Erinyes exact vengeance. I don't think for a minute that he can be so ignorant of journalistic history in this country for the past quarter century that he can fail to see the *exact* analogy between his scenario and the censorship of such magazines as Chicago Review, Prairie Schooner, Northwest Review, to name only three among dozens of cases. Similarly in the current issue, where he implicitly calls for publishers to censor their authors' sentiments, as if the very nature of their trade and tastes did not effect this already. That his context is anti-semitism is incidental, since one season's anti-semitism becomes the next's communism and the next's pornography. . . . Noxious ideologies have more changes of fashion than Sassoon's designer jeans. Weinberger's in sad shape for a writer; his glittery prose masks his loss of faith in the word, which he's exchanged for a censor's axe. Even in his huffy passion to stick modernist heads on poles he reveals the larger

consequences, loss of faith in the critical enterprise, in the polity to differentiate better from worse. And if there is one thing that validates literary journalism, subsidized or not, it is this faith. Without that, it doesn't make much difference whether it's Eliot or "Cap" Weinberger swinging the axe.

PETER MICHELSON

. . . on the Europeans vs Americans in Eliot's piece—I'm thinking of the Futurists, who were conceptualizing their work—the *Italian* Futurists—along protofascist lines; or Celine, say. Eliot actually quotes Marinetti positively. But this is the Marinetti who in his 1929 salute to Mussolini ends with: "For which reason we Futurists, prophets and preparers of the great Italy of today, are happy to salute . . . a marvelous Futurist temperament" (Mussolini was at the time President of the Council of Ministers). Keep in mind that Marinetti's most famous manifesto is called "War, the Only Hygiene": this was not intended as humor. Marinetti left the Fascist party in 1920 and publicly renounced and condemned antisemitism in the arts in *1938*, after years of what R. W. Flint (in the introduction to the *Selected Writings*—Farrar, Straus; 1972) called "uneasy support for the regime." However, I certainly do not know very much about Marinetti. Like many artists with what Eliot calls "embarrassing biographies," Marinetti's is a confusing (complex may be the better word) story because he was also, essentially, a champion of 'anarchic individualism—beyond communism.' Still, I don't think Williams, repellent as the quoted letter is, stacks up badly against Marinetti! (*Imaginations* remains as great an ode to freedom as anything produced in "Europe"—if we must make such nationalistic comparisons—and it can hardly be described, as Eliot's generalizations would lead us to do, as a search for "historical validation" and a struggle against "people" as the "enemies of art.") But meanwhile, back to the Europeans, there were other Italian Futurists who did not have Marinetti's qualms and who took up Mussolini's message more eagerly. In any case, Marinetti's whole rage against tradition, the old art, is tied to protofascist ideas about the violent introduction of the new order of speed & guns etc.: not as benign a phenomenon as Eliot implies. Certainly, Marinetti looked to artists to be the creators of a new order: this is not, as Eliot suggests, as U.S. thing. Then one could go on to Riefenstahl, who was also a European 'New Age' artist, or the whole German context; naturally many artists (especially Jews!) left, but not all—and you can't, after the fact, say the profascists, or those who tolerated fascism, were by definition not "avant garde." Wasn't Heidegger "avant garde," or does this only apply to "artists" (and you can defend Heidegger too for that matter). Celine certainly wasn't a Dadaist, but I don't think people like him can simply be dropped from the argument. It would be possible to go on at length—the point being

you can't just divide "Americans" and "Europeans" in this way; not to mention that "avant garde" is a problematic and overgeneral term. I don't know the political history of many of Eliot's "Europeans"—I haven't read possibly suppressed letters by them to compare to theWilliams letter. But I don't think 'our' writers—Stein, HD, Oppen, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, Riding (to name just a few) fit into neat generalizations on these points, or that they can be amalgamated for easy contrast with "European" modernists. The problem with this kind of overgeneralization is brought home when Eliot enters the present. On one page, he praises European modernists over American ones for "dismantling the received culture"; but on the next page he blasts contemporary American poets for "deconstructing their 'belief systems'"—which sounds curiously close to *thinking* about them; and since some of those "belief systems," as Eliot so persuasively and eloquently shows, are rascist and intolerant, it doesn't seem all that bad a development to me. . . .

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

It was good to read Eliot Weinberger's essay in the last *Sulfur.* The argument may be old, but many of the facts (especially about Williams) are new—and damning. What we now need is a systematic study of the racism, misogyny, homophobia, and anti-semitism that literary historians have tried to ignore. It's not a question of discrediting the poetry—Pound's influence on Zukofsky gives the lie to that simplification.

(Weinberger bizarrely insinuates that L.Z. was himself an anti-semite—or at any rate that he mimicked *Pound's* prejudice. But from the Yiddish in *Poem beginning "The,"* to *A Song for the Year's End,* to the transliteration of *Job* in *A-15,* Zukofsky's Jewishness is very much on the surface. And there is no question that the objectivists were themselves ignored because they were Jewish. Look at Horace Gregory's response to the Zukofsky-edited issue of *Poetry:*

> I believe the issue is a landmark, an important historical event in the writing of American poetry. It is, however, a Left Bank issue with offices on lower Fifth Avenue, New York, where the *Menorah Journal* appears whenever it can raise enough money to ship copy to the printer. There is a curious strain of Jewish nationalism, disguised as a Greek chorus, reciting its refrain throughout the poems. As a middle-westerner of pioneer American stock, with a touch of Edgar Lee Masters in my make-up, I feel a bit lonely, particularly in New York . . .

The tone of this letter may be a far cry from the vitriol of Pound's radio broadcasts; but the premise, that the objectivists fall short of success because they're too Jewish and too un-American, still rankles. Nor was this a private response—Harriet Monroe duly published it in a subsequent number.)

It's no secret that the poets seized on by the English department as representative of modernism had the worst politics. Luckily, literature is the expression of a community, not just the product of three or four exemplary writers. Hart Crane, Laura Riding, Gertrude Stein, H.D., Mina Loy, Louis Zukofsky, Basil Bunting, Lorine Niedecker, Charles Reznikoff, and George Oppen are also part of our tradition.

Here we have, as early as 1909, an authentically fascist aesthetic.

The Nazis labeled *all* modern art "entartete Kunst"—but some of the *degenerates* went over to the other side. ("Die Brücke"'s primitivist expressionists were especially susceptible.) Not surprisingly, the political disagreements within the various art movements mirrored the divisions that tore apart Europe itself. Giorgio de Chirico, best known as a surrealist, broke from Marinetti's group over the issue of war, not art; and though René Char was a member of the French Resistance, his countryman Louis Ferdinand Celine wrote propaganda for the Nazi occupation. In Europe, as in America, there was an Ernst Jünger for every Thomas Mann, a Hamsun for every Mayakovsky.

Also, not all European modernism was as anti-art as Weinberger claims—what could have been more art-historical than *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach*? Or as preoccupied with purely aesthetic issues as *De Styl*?

The logical postscript to a discussion of Pound's anti-semitism, then, is a look at the Jewish experimenters themselves—and there were several.

Laura Riding, nee Reichenthal, now Laura (Riding) Jackson, comes immediately to mind. For one thing, *Riding's* test of poetry—that it should encompass reality in its "entire breadth and depth," and reveal the truth—is the only serious challenge yet made on Pound's definition of the poem as "news that stays news." Needless to say, news and truth aren't the same thing—a fact that's nowhere more apparent than in war. (Pound used the word "news" to signify two different things: language, and perception—language charged with subjectivity, and hard facts about objective reality.* Riding considered such things mere phenomena. Truth, she reminds us in *The Telling*, is what *explains* this news.)

The onset of war must have made art seem all the more corruptible to Riding—is it a coincidence that she turned away from poetry in 1939? After all, the manipulated reality Leni Riefenstahl presents in *Triumph of the Will* (to give an obvious example) is exactly that *substitute* for truth Riding refused to honor. In light of poems like the one Weinberger quotes ("a kike is the most dangerous / machine as yet invented"—E.E. Cummings, 1950), her renunciation of poetic language reveals itself as well-timed, and ethical.

Finally: many of Riding's poems read as meditations on Jewish themes. *The Map of Places* describes a homelessness that has nothing to do with nationalism ("Now on naked names feet stand, / No geographies in

*All through *ABC of Reading* Pound refines his definition. The two phrases I'm thinking of here are "only emotion endures" and "artists are the antennae of the race."

the hand"); *The Wind Suffers* and *The Judgement* recall the Old Testament. Her best poems have that mix of anger, resignation, and common sense I associate with the Jews of the diaspora:

THEN WHEREFORE DEATH

Death, removal of names, disappearance
Of flesh, furtherance, discrepancy—
Who worships this,
What thing of abased calling
Prays for equality?

Humanity lives by ambition
And by fortune dies:
Commemorative leafiness and intertreeing
Of conversant ranks in death it has;

No death. Then wherefore grief,
Pang of democracy?
Since we do not kill our dead,
But bury?

BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

Eliot Weinberger replies:

Michaelson's charge that I am "trigger happy about censorship" is representative of the comfort and complacency of American writers. Most of us have no idea what the word means, though its reality would be apparent enough after five minutes in South Africa or Cuba, Chile or Czechoslovakia, or almost anywhere outside of Western Europe and the U.S.

Censorship is the prohibition *by the state* of the production or dissemination of certain works. It is enforced with fire and prison, torture and execution; in parts of the world the act of reading is a crime. Though my own "position" hardly matters, I am opposed to any censorship of anything anywhere—including pornography, Nazi tracts, U.S. or Soviet propaganda in the Third World, anything—with the obvious exception of pornography which employs children in its production. But—more to the point—I also see no reason why anyone or any institution should publish or support material they find reprehensible, except in the interests of historical illumination.

I think *Paideuma*, as the in-house magazine of the Pound industry, should publish the most loathesome of Pound's writings (for example, his correspondence with John Kasper) rather than pretend they do not exist. On the other hand, I do not understand why the magazine allows its contributors to use its pages for irrelevant asides of political quackery—such as defending the honor of Marshall Pétain—unless those sentiments are shared by the editors. If the sentiments are not shared, then the editors

should not hide behind the "honorable gentlemen with diverse views" facade, and simply tell their writers to knock it off. The suggestion is hardly scandalous.

In the case of the *Chicago Review* in 1959—I don't know the *Northwest Review* and *Prairie Schooner* incidents cited by Michaelson—the University of Chicago certainly had the right to be wrong, in refusing to allow the publication of writings by Burroughs and Kerouac. The issue later appeared as *Big Table* No. 1, and was widely read—perhaps more widely read than it would have been without the controversy. In the end, the university and the avant-garde remained, for the moment, themselves, convictions reinforced. It was a (temporary) suppression—the word used in the *Big Table* editorial—not censorship. The work got out, and no one went to prison. (A few years later, the forbidden writers became regular contributors, and Michaelson himself was editor.) One can only imagine the same scenario in, say, Paraguay.

In the case of the Cummings poem, Oxford University Press exercised their editorial right by suppressing the words "pricked and cunted" (which Cummings willingly changed to "prigged and canted") but they apparently had no objection to the rest of the poem, which begins "a kike is the most dangerous / machine as yet invented." What interests me is not Cummings' ravings as much as Oxford's validation of those ravings—and of course the irony of what was considered obscene in 1950, after the publication of the Dachau photographs.

As for *Rolling Stock* and its AIDS Awards, I questioned why the Boulder Arts Council and the University of Colorado—public institutions which presumably exist to benefit the common weal—should support the publication of such hateful dreck. Institutional support implies institutional approval: if they want to promote AIDS Awards they should be willing to answer criticism. On the other hand, if *RS* is going to take government money, they must be accountable to the government (and citizens) for what they publish. This is indeed a subtle and pernicious form of censorship, and one which has been visible in the little magazines since the NEA and local governments started handing out the cash. But surely *RS* knew what they were getting into: All money comes with strings attached.

What I find depressing about the AIDS Awards and Michaelson's letter is their trivialization of very real demons. Thus, under the weird rubric of "idiocy," a particularly dreadful disease is reduced to a fluffy blurb on a book jacket (Creeley's crime, for which *RS* presented him with AIDS). Thus, Casper Weinberger, the master of a 270 billion-dollar-a-year death machine, a man willing and able to sacrifice all of us in the name of anticommunism, a man quite literally stealing bread from the hungry, is reduced to Eliot Weinberger, the obscure author of a few polemical essays on poetry. It plays right into Reagan's "feel good about America" strategy: If Casper is nothing worse than a large-scale version of Eliot Weinberger, AIDS but a bit of pobiz gossip, and censorship nothing more than some editorial pencilling and the loss of a local grant, then what's to worry?

In fact there are plenty of threats to the First Amendment worth worrying about: book-bannings in local schools and libraries, fundamentalist Christian attempts to enact legislation on everything from biology textbooks to television melodramas to rock lyrics, Reagan Administration restrictions on the exchange of scientific papers, foreign writers prevented from entering America under the McCarran Act, federal employees being required to have all their future writings cleared by the government, the epidemic of libel suits, and on and on. These are not being discussed in the literary magazines which, since the Vietnam War, have assumed that a set of liberal values are shared by editors, writers and readers. This is simply no longer the case: that Michaelson finds me more vile than Podhoretz and Kramer merely indicates that he hasn't read the poets and critics they have pushed into prominence. (Or does he, as an AIDS awarder, applaud the recent *The New Criterion* attack on Ginsberg as a promoter of pederasty and drug use among the young?)

Getting back to the matter at hand:

Obviously I don't think Zukofsky was an anti-Semite. Based on the selections from the Pound-Zukofsky letters published in *Montemora*, it's clear that his filial piety toward Pound went as far as anti-Semitic remarks. ("Do I luf my peepul? The only good Jew I know is my father: a coincidence.") Further judgment withheld until the New Directions publication of the complete correspondence. Meanwhile, consider the Pound poem which Zukofsky included in *An "Objectivists" Anthology:* "Der yiddisher Charleston band."

Marinetti's Fascist posturings were utterly different from Pound's, as Bernstein points out—he would have gone for anything which promised to blow up everything. The presence of a few Fascist European writers hardly signifies—nor have Hamsun, Junger, Céline and Marinetti been enshrined as "central figures" to the extent of Pound or Eliot. My point was really European "creation of a new order" vs. American "restoration of the old order." But it's quite disheartening that Bernstein's and Friedlander's overlapping "good guys" lists consist mainly of Jewish writers.

The question is not who was or wasn't, but rather why the American avant-garde was fueled by the hatred of ethnic minorities and contempt for the masses, why the avant-gardes on both sides of the Atlantic were dependent on elite (and misogynous) brotherhoods of "movements." Even among the good guys there was a fatal adherence to group authority: H.D. certainly believed from the beginning (see her poem "Cities" in her first book, *Sea Garden*) in a beleaguered band of spiritual beauty-lovers, the last Hellenes. Zukofsky invented a group, Objectivists, out of nothing—a collection of largely disparate poets—and suffered his whole life from self-perceived powerlessness as much as neglect. Poets I revere like Oppen and MacDiarmid spent their lives in the Communist Party—through the Munich pact, through the Moscow trials, the Gulag.

The others, like Bunting, Loy, Stein, Reznikoff, Niedecker, worked in a peculiar isolation—literary friendships without literary allegiances, a personal rather than collective poetics, no political beliefs visible in the writings—much like many of the best American poets today. It may well be that the group of very fine poets born between 1935 and 1945 (Ronald

Johnson, Clayton Eshleman, Clark Coolidge, Karin Lessing, Robert Kelly, Susan Howe, Gustaf Sobin, Rachel DuPlessis, Michael Palmer, among others) represent the last generation of American Modernism. It is not difficult to imagine that history, if it exists, will telescope the chronology and see their considerable accomplishments as of a piece with Zukofsky, Vallejo, Olson, Celan, Apollinaire, Huidobro, and so many others.

And yet I can't help but feel that those of us born after 1945 were born—for all the obvious reasons—into another world, and that this generation has yet to find its poetry. Those in the universities have reduced poetry to anecdote and craftsmanship: a sometimes witty form of macramé which, at its best, follows the precepts of Imagism. Those who consider themselves "avant-garde" are restaging the battles of Russian Futurism and Dadaism under the banners of the latest linguistic hypotheses. The best literary magazines give much of their space to "archival material," and we hotly debate, as here, what Ez and Bill said or didn't say in 1922. And yet the historical distance between us and the pioneer modernists is the distance between "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," between *zaum* and *Eugene Onegin*, between Hugo's major poetry and Tristan Tzara.

It is time for the modern masters to become ancestors, to become as ancient *and* contemporary as Li Shang-yin or Christopher Smart, Dickinson or Holderlin, Ausias March or Ono no Komachi. In the current climate of hagiolatry and nostalgia, the demons of elitism and contempt that gave modernism its strength have been generally ignored. But they have not gone away. They are, I think, an obstacle between my generation and its poetry—a poetry that will not be "postmodern" (defined by modernism) but something that will come into being only when the great century of modernism is declared over.

Who knows what it will be? But I suspect that the road to a new poetry will start out from ethnopoetics, which seems to be the most fruitful and interesting configuration in American poetry in the last 20 years.

The first generation of ethnopoetics, defined and promoted by Jerome Rothenberg, encompassed "primitivism" (in the modernist sense), 60's countercultural tribalism and "back to the land" ecological concern, Dadaism, the anti-imperialism of the Vietnam War era and its revolutionary romanticism, art as performance, orality, nostalgia for the Golden Age, and the visionary worlds and language of mystics, shamans, poets, schizophrenics, trippers.

The problem with this first flowering of ethnopoetics (as with the recent huge "Primitivism" show at the Museum of Modern Art) was that it tended to take the tribal work out of its context, concentrating on form rather than content, and thereby allowing both strange interpretation and facile reproduction. Thus collective vision was reduced to individual vision, their real became indistinguishable from our surreal, their ritual became our performance, their shamans our poets.

What was generally not discussed was the function of these "poems," most of which are not poems at all in our sense, but what we would call legal contracts, prescription drugs, birth-death-marriage certificates, public relations, prayers, weather and crop forecasts, historical archives, good luck charms, how-to books, atlases, star charts, genealogical records, the evening news, the world almanac.

It is a poetry of essential service. It is a poetry that ratifies the social contract of language. It is a poetry that describes its world, its history, its cosmos. A poetry of celebration *and* condemnation of the stuff and the way of the world. Song, narrative, speech: People talking to the gods and to each other.

All this is gone, or almost gone, from American poetry, and from most of the poetry of the Western languages. But now that so much tribal poetry has been translated, adapted, imitated, I think it time to shift the attention from the works to the makers, text to context, in order to reconsider and revise the poet's traditional role as icon-maker and iconoclast, philosopher, historian, intellectual conscience, spokesman for those who are not speaking (including non-human species), political commentator, natural scientist, maker of prayers and aphrodisiacs, officiant at the great transitions in life. Otherwise, we're talking to ourselves in private languages, hoping someone will listen after we're dead—gambling, in the nuclear world, that there will be someone to listen.

A Seifert Translation

After Jaroslav Seifert received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984, I noticed an article on him by Christopher Lehmann-Haupt in The New York Times (December 20, 1984). Mr. Lehmann/Haupt spent most of his article trying to figure out what kind of poetry Seifert wrote. He was under the impression that the only English translation of Seifert was a serial poem, "The Plague Monument," translated by Lyn Coffin. After quoting a couple of unrevealing passages from the poem, and querying several scholars, Lehmann-Haupt came to the rather lame conclusion that you have to understand Czech to appreciate what Seifert was up to. The dark implication that crossed his entire article was that other than writing in the vernacular in a way that might vaguely remind an American reader of Frost's conversational exchanges, and having a sense of humor, Seifert was not about much at all.

The article made me curious about Seifert, who I had never heard

of before the prize—although for the past two years, with Frantisek Galan (a professor of Slavic Literature at the University of Texas, Austin) I have been translating a long poem by another Czech poet of Seifert's generation, Vladimir Holan, who died in 1979. Holan's "A Night With Hamlet" was a tremendous discovery, so upon hearing that there was another book of Seifert's poetry already translated, I sought it out eagerly.

The Casting of Bells (The Spirit That Moves Us Press, Iowa City, 1983) was translated by Paul Jagasich and Tom O'Grady. In their brief Foreword, the translators mention that they have translated the entire contents of a book by Seifert published in 1967. The first poem is called "Prologue," and I could hardly believe what I read. In the first stanza, we are given the thoughts of a lark preoccupied with the mold under its lover's arm! In the second stanza, the lark turns into a dove who we are told flies through the forest *because* she hears voices! I suspected that Seifert was neither a Surrealist or a mystic, but that he had been very inaccurately translated, so I showed the poem to several people who read Czech and English. Here is their composite literal version set side by side with the Jagasich/O'Grady one.

Jagasich/O'Grady

PROLOGUE

Being a poet is not quite so.

The lark appears in the forest
Flying over the nest
And cannot stop thinking
—Oh, you sinful bliss:
Warm, tossed-up mold
Under my lover's arm.

A dove goes through those same woods
Because she hears voices,
And all gently quivers around her.
I am now watching
A group of young women—
One there; another:
Those that disappear quietly
And evoke only yearning.
No,
I am only leaves and blossoms,
And the rose-colored flowers of trees
Which sparkle after a rain:
So beautiful in the daylight,
But then, at night . . .
But I cannot be this.

When a poet raised his voice
And blood gushed forth,
Men rushed to their weapons
And women started madly cutting
Their dark and golden hair

Literal Version

PROLOGUE

Being a poet is not that easy.

He finds a silver-throated bird
Flying over its nest
And cannot stop thinking
—Oh, you sinful bliss—
Of the warm, disheveled hollow
Under his loved one's arm.

But he goes deep into the woods
Because he hears voices,
And all gently quivers around him.
And you'll never believe it!
He spies up close
The downy laps of young women—
One there, another—
Disappearing into the distance
And evoking only yearning.
No,
They are only leaves and blossoms,
And rose-colored pine trunks
Sparkling after rain:
It is most beautiful in the daylight,
And then, at night . . .
But I am not that.

Once a poet raised his voice
And blood crowed forth.
Men rushed to their weapons

For bowstrings.
Clean strands stronger than nylon cord.
Now they all have short hair
And hurry to the injured
And carefully place antiseptic bandages
Upon human wounds
And put our bleeding heads
On a stretcher's white pillow
They do the least to us.

If the tyrant does not fall
(and even that we inherit)
The poet is sentenced to silence
And the clenched fist opens
To spread over the singer's mouth.
But he shouts his verses through bars,
While book thieves
Get to work fast,
    But I am not him.

Sometimes doubt beats one word against another
To forge certainty,
But it is never the one truth in this world.
And heated words walk limp
A brief distance, until death,
Where they remain an unspoken secret
Setting fire to a darkness that does not move
In the enormous grave
But only clings
To miserable bones:
The mark of fire
Which they left in the pocket
Of the shot victim.
    But I am not him.

And women started mindlessly cutting
Their heavy and deep-red hair
For bowstrings.
They are more supple than nylon cord.
Now they all have short hair
And so prepare gauze for bandages,
And hurry to the wounded
To lay their bleeding heads
On the stretcher of their breasts.

If the tyrant does not fall
(and that too is inherited)
The poet is sentenced to silence
An angular hand of wire
Stuffs the singer's mouth with claws
But he, he shouts his verses through the wire,
While the book tearers
Get to work fast,
    But I am not those.

Sometimes in despair he beats one word against another
To forge certainty,
But there is none in this world.
And in vain he hurls
Burning words into the
Distance beyond death,
To shake a mute secret,
To set fire to a darkness that does not move
In that enormous grave
But only clings
To miserable bones
Streaked with verdigris from the lighter
They left in the pocket
Of the shot victim.
    But I am not that!

When I inquired of one person how it was possible that Jagasich and O'Grady had misread "deep" for "dove," I was told that the words look similar in Czech (*hloub/holub*) but represent different roots. It would seem that neither translators have a first-year student knowledge of the language they are translating, and lest one think that their mauling of Seifert's "Prologue" is the exception and not the rule, I offer a few more examples of their work from other poems in the collection:

Jagasich/O'Grady	Literal Versions
She who had so often Danced on Lubut Lake	She who had so often Danced on Swan Lake
*	*
It was afternoon or later, A meal under the oak	It was afternoon or later, Perhaps at the end of April
*	*
and my lover's arms lingered with need.	and the girl trembled with (sexual) delight
*	*
Nor the moon on a dark night	Nor the moon on a black skirt

As I read through the book, I began to wonder if the Nobel Prize Committee had read it. One would assume that in the case of languages of smaller nations that such a Committee would be considerably dependent upon translations into various world languages, and I must admit that the hair-raising thought crossed my mind that the Committee had not only read the Jagasich/O'Grady translation, but that it had influenced their decision in a positive way! It also occurred to me that if, say, one of the Committee could read a poet in his original language as well as the translated language upon which other Committee members were totally dependent, and were he to say that the translation was inaccurate, that poet would be immediately disqualified because the rest of the Committee could not properly evaluate his work.

The situation raises many more questions than answers, including the question of the quality of Seifert's poetry—for the literal version of "Prologue," while it does reveal that Seifert is not demented, does not indicate that he is a very engaging or original poet. Even when I imagine "Prologue" in a more polished version, it still seems trite and sentimental. Given the floodlight of the Prize, I presume that other translators are now at work on Seifert, and I hope that what they offer us will be accurate as well as worthwhile reading.

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN

" . . . the pregnancy has created in me a deep calm, which I love, and a feeling of connectedness with nature . . . I have seen the Goddess twice, once in a treasure ship in our fields behind the house, laden with furry white cows, magnolia trees covered with snow on the leaves like little white gloves, black cats with green eyes like the woods; and once waving in the icy arms of trees as sunlight was striking them. These encounters leave me strengthened, less fearful about giving birth since I have an ally. The Goddess has royal blue eyebrows the color of her silk shorts, and hyacinth nipples, though those change color with the weather and her moods. She is never cold."

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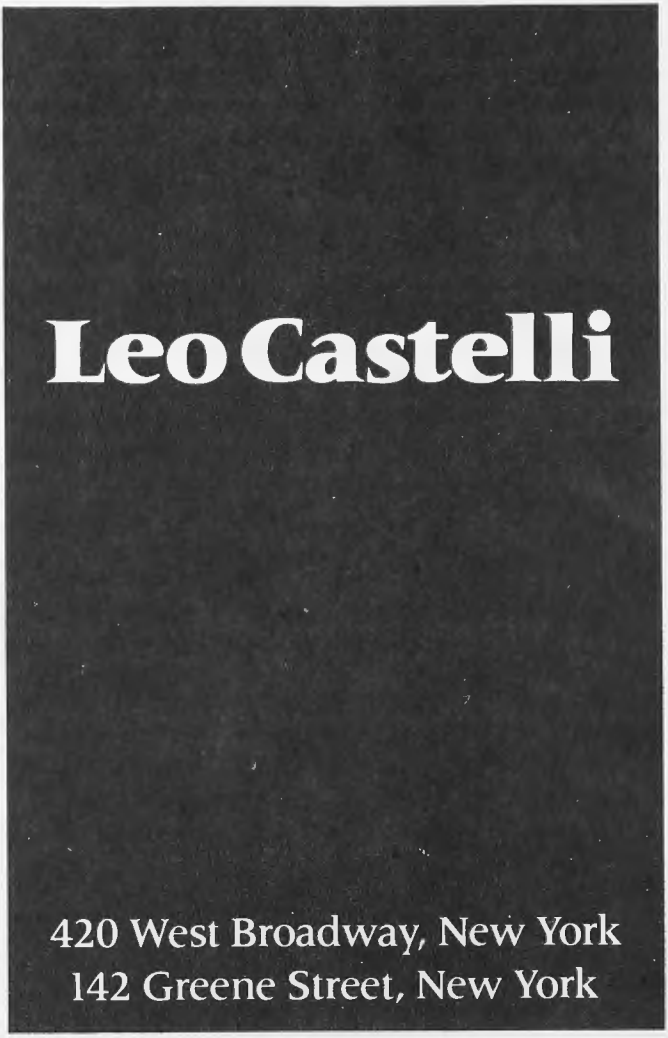
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